

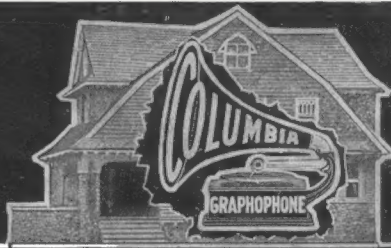
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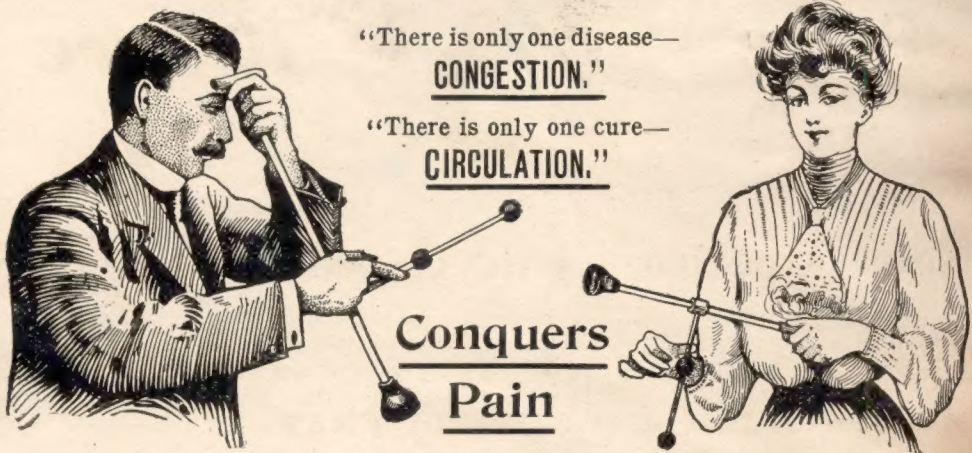
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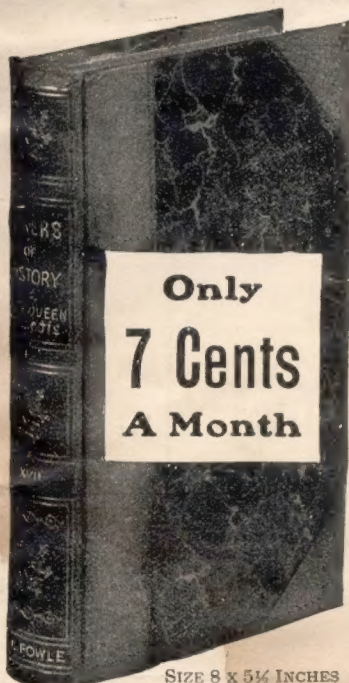
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A Chat With You

THE present number is our initial effort at giving you a larger and better POPULAR MAGAZINE. With its full-length novel, complete; with its long list of short stories, serials, and novelettes; with its 224 solid pages of fiction of the finest type that can be secured, it is the biggest and best magazine that we have ever issued. It is a larger magazine than any one else has ever attempted in the past. We are now awaiting your approval. We know that we have your sympathy and backing in this attempt which is now taking all our energies. The opposite page contains a few representative letters selected from a great many sent in by our readers. To merit and hold your good opinion we had to make this number better as well as bigger than the last. We must make succeeding numbers better still.



SOME months ago we printed on the page facing this a photographic reproduction of a brief letter from one of our readers, B. W. Hurst, of Seattle, Washington. We selected it for publication because it said in the fewest words and in the most forcible way the same thing that a great many other readers had been saying to us. During the present season we have received many more similar letters. We quote Mr. Hurst

once again, as he voices the sentiment of the majority of those who have been writing to us recently:

I have one great kick coming. Why in thunder don't you issue THE POPULAR every week? I grow thin waiting for it.

Yours in admiration,



IN commenting upon the letter at the time, we mentioned the physical impossibility of issuing a magazine like ours oftener than once a month. Since then, we have considered the problem time and again. The present issue, with its increase in size of 32 pages, is our answer to those who have written to us. It represents our best effort to comply with the request of our readers. At the same time, it makes possible a plan that we have had in mind for some time. It gives us the opportunity of including in each number of the magazine a complete novel of the length issued in the standard \$1.50 book. The mechanical difficulties involved in issuing a magazine of 224 pages each month and of distributing it, in editions such as we require, throughout the length and breadth of the continent can only be appreciated by the printer and the circulation man. Each of our readers expects to be able to secure a copy of the magazine, every month, from his news-dealer. Some of our readers are in Winnipeg, and some in Mexico City;

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

some in Portland, Maine, and some in Los Angeles. We have readers in every town and village, in every section of farm land that lies between these points. It is our duty to see that not one of them is disappointed. When you take into consideration the fact that this army of readers is increasing largely every month, you can imagine, perhaps, better than we can explain, the difficulty that faces us.



THAT, however, is only one of the problems. Any book publisher thinks he is doing well if he makes one or two hits a year. If he brings out a dozen books, and sells over twenty thousand copies of one of them, he is a success— notwithstanding the fact that the others may have been dead failures. In other words, if in twelve attempts he succeeds in suiting the tastes of twenty thousand readers with a single story, he is doing as well as can be expected. We issue twelve numbers a year. Each contains a novel. Each of the twelve novels must please not twenty thousand readers, but *three hundred and fifty thousand!* We *must* please our readers with each of the novels. Our readers buy THE POPULAR because they know what we have done in the past, and feel confident that we will give them good stories in the future. The man who buys a book never buys it because of the publisher's imprint. He buys it because he has heard some one speak about it favorably, because he likes the author, on speculation more or less. The man who buys THE POPULAR buys it on our guarantee of the quality of the fiction it contains. We *must* justify this confidence.

THE complete novels which, commencing with this issue of THE POPULAR, will be one of its principal features, are selected from the best work of the best writers of popular fiction. "The King of Arcadia," by Francis Lynde, is a story such as few publishers ever have a chance of securing. All the books written by Francis Lynde have scored a big success. His latest book, contained in this number of the magazine and to be issued in book form next year, is certain to score much more heavily than anything he has written in the past. Next month we will publish "Adventurers Extraordinary," by George Bronson-Howard. Arrangements have already been made for its publication in book form in the spring. The author, whose "Norroy" stories appeared recently in THE POPULAR, has been at work on this new novel for the greater part of a year. Its scene is laid in an island in the Pacific where he sojourned for some time, and its plot was suggested by an affair which has now become a part of the secret history of the Orient. Some of the characters who take part in its vigorous action will be readily recognized, by those who have known the East, as real people, now living. The story, which concerns an international conspiracy and tells of its failure through the efforts of several private citizens of the United States, has unusual strength and vigor. From the moment that you make the acquaintance of Brent, the novelist; Hopworth Dreen, the athlete; Pursey Ochs, the newspaper man; Schlauss Hyman, the great surgeon; and Dorothy Gordon, the beautiful American girl, all on board the P. M. S.S. *Sultana*, outward bound from San Francisco for the East,

A CHAT WITH YOU—Continued.

you are tied to the story until you have finished it.



IN succeeding numbers we will present novels by Crittenden Marriott, W. B. M. Ferguson, author of "Garrison's Finish"; J. Kenilworth Egerton, Doctor Henry Rowland, the author of "Sea Scamps" and "The Mountain of Fears"; Bertrand Sinclair, and B. M. Bower. We are now busy making arrangements for other novels which we will announce to you later. In the meantime we can promise that the other features of the magazine will be raised to an even higher standard than before. Arthur Paterson, whose long experience in the West, combined with his ability to tell a good story, fits him unusually well for the task, starts a new serial, entitled "A Son of the Plains," in January.



STRANGE Cases of a Medical Free-lance," a new series of short, complete stories will also commence in the January issue. A doctor has better opportunities of seeing strange phases of life than any other professional man. Ever since Hippocrates taught the art of healing, the ethics of the profession has bound physicians to secrecy as to what they may learn in the practise of their profession. With the exception of Conan Doyle, no writer of ability has hitherto attempted to enter this field, and Conan Doyle wrote only a few medical stories at the outset of his career. The hero of Mr. Ferguson's stories is Tiberius W. Tinkle, eccentric, daring, and a doctor to his finger-tips. He has the ability and knowledge that would make him famous in his profession, but

they are coupled with a roving disposition, an outspoken love of justice, and a carelessness of consequence that, while they endear the doctor to us, also prevent him from settling down to a lucrative practise. He has the instinct and temperament of the great physician; he can see through shams, disregard outward appearances, and from a casual glance discover things that are hidden from the rest of the world. His medical knowledge enables him to discover crimes and prevent them, to expose frauds, to live in a world of strange excitement utterly beyond the ken of the ordinary man. The first of the series, "The Case of the Atavistic Patient," is a story so original in plot, so baffling in its mystery, so surprising in its dénouement, as to be absolutely startling. We can confidently predict that this new series will score a greater success and set more people talking than any other series of short tales that we have ever published.



THERE are other exceptionally fine things in the next issue of the magazine. "Napoleon and the Trust," by J. B. Corbet, Jr., is a novelette with the scene laid in Alaska, and has a grip and fascination hard to find. We wish we had more space to talk about it. "Cleopatra's Necklace," by J. Kenilworth Egerton, is a hypnotic story full of incident and the unexpected. "The Gaunt Serang," by Louis Joseph Vance, and "Spanish Gold," by K. and Hesketh Prichard, are each in themselves big enough to make the biggest feature of any magazine. The whole number is one that we feel proud of, and are eager to have you read.

What Our Readers Think of the Change

Not Scared by Raise of Price.

PITTSBURG, Pa.

We, the undersigned, have read your announcement in regard to the increase of price of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, and desire to say that our "limit" is twenty-five cents. If you don't go beyond this, we will "see" you. We have read THE POPULAR since its first issue, and purpose to continue doing so. So you don't need to try to scare us off by raising the price. Respectfully,

H. D. HOWARD,
F. M. HOWARD.

The Only Magazine to Hold Its Own.

LITCHFIELD, Ill.

I have just brought home the November number of THE POPULAR, and the first page I turned to happened to be your announcement that you would raise the price to fifteen cents, and for the readers of the magazine to write and tell you what they thought about the magazine in general.

I have read THE POPULAR from the first number, and in that time have started and stopped reading many other magazines. THE POPULAR is the only one that has held its own with me; it is good all through.

Yours truly, WM. F. LA FORCE.

None Can Compare With "The Popular."

BAYONNE, N. J.

I started reading THE POPULAR MAGAZINE in May, 1904, and since then I have never missed a copy, and if ever there was a magazine well worth fifteen cents it is that one. I don't think the stories could be any better; the cover is the nicest of any I have ever seen, and I have read and seen the best of them. None of them can compare with THE POPULAR. Your young friend,

CHARLES ROBERTS (age, 16).

Worth More Than the Price.

NEW YORK CITY.

As per notice in the November issue of your POPULAR MAGAZINE regarding advance of price, beg to say that I think it really is time that you thought of doing this, as the publication is worth even far more than you now intend to charge for it. Compared with thirty-five-cent magazines, it has them beat a thousand ways, according to my estimation. I have read THE POPULAR for quite some time, and shall always read it if you were to advance it to fifty cents, provided the quality remains the same.

Wishing the publication the success it deserves, I remain, its ardent admirer,

MISS C. G.

The Extra Nickel Deserved.

NEWMARKET, N. H.

I am informed by the November issue of THE POPULAR that next month I will have to add a nickel to the dime I have so cheerfully paid each month for that "best-of-all" magazines.

Good for you! You ought to have done it long ago. If any publishers deserve that extra nickel, you are the ones.

I have been a reader of THE POPULAR ever since its first issue, and I have yet to find a dull number.

Your authors and their stories are all right, and B. M. Bower heads the list. Give us more of him. Wishing you all kinds of success, I remain, a friend of THE POPULAR,
CLARENCE H. NEAL.

At Thirty-five Cents, "The Popular" Would Still Be More Than Reasonable.

BROOKLYN, N. Y.

You have asked for your readers' opinions as to your change in price. Here is mine: At ten cents THE POPULAR was farcically cheap. At fifteen cents the price is ridiculously low. At thirty-five cents—the highest-priced monthly, I believe—THE POPULAR would still be more than reasonable, considering what we get from it. As an example of the value of THE POPULAR, according to my lights, take the five concluding paragraphs, in the present issue, of Mr. Scott Campbell's "Felix Boyd"—they alone are worth much more than the price of THE POPULAR. "Done In Oil" is neat—very. All success to you.

Very truly yours, LOWELL MASON.

Pleased at the Change.

NASHVILLE, Tenn.

I am, indeed, pleased to note, in your current issue, of ~~your~~ contemplated change, commencing with the December issue, and the advance in price. I am sure it will not cause one of your many readers to stop taking THE POPULAR. Personally, I would not be without THE POPULAR even were it twenty-five cents per copy.

I desire to take this opportunity to advise you that I have been a reader of your magazine since the very first issue, and have not missed a number; and I further desire to say that you have, without doubt, the best magazine published, excepting none. It seems that you improve with every issue, and each story I read in it seems to be just a little better than the other one.

Wishing you all the success you justly deserve with THE POPULAR, I am, truly, your friend,
O. ULMANN.

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VOL. VII.

NO. 2

The Popular Magazine

CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER, 1906

THE KING OF ARCADIA. A Complete Novel,	Francis Lynde	1
The tragedies and comedies connected with the building of a great dam in Colorado.		
IN PRIMITIVE FASHION		60
A NIGHT WITH LISPING JIMMIE. A Short Story,	W. B. M. Ferguson	61
A new kind of detective story, with the action centering around a man whose lisp was the least deceptive thing about him.		
O'ROURKE, THE WANDERER. A Series,	Louis Joseph Vance	69
II.—Captain Hole, of the "Pelican."		
THE BENEFACITOR AND THE BUMPS. A Short Story,	William Hamilton Osborne	86
How the residents of Flatbrookville rid the town of one of the ten modern plagues.		
WHEN THE LODGER STRUCK		92
THE MAN OF SECRETS. A Serial Story,	William Le Queux	93
The maze of mystery that surrounded the possession and subsequent loss of a great secret.		
THE CALL OF THE PHONE		107
THE HALL OF MIRTH. A Short Story,	B. M. Bower	108
In which Bud Preston, cowboy, sets forth the origin and history of an elaborate "holly."		
DIAMONDS MADE AT HOME		116
THE ADVENTURE OF THE KING-PIN GAMBLER	J. Egerton	117
A Complete Novel.		
Which tells of a remarkable encounter between Tommy Williams, hypnotist, and Wakefield, a notorious New York gambler.		
'T WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT		157
THE FORTUNES OF GEOFF. A Series,	K. and Hesketh Prichard	158
III.—A Price on His Head.		
THE BREAD-CUTTER AT TRANQUILLITY POORHOUSE	Howard R. Garis	168
A Short Story.		
How an old seaman engineered the most unique mutiny on record.		
IN THE CAUSE OF FREEDOM. A Serial Story,	Arthur W. Marchmont	173
How a tourist in Russian Poland finds himself engulfed in the maelstrom of revolution.		
ON JOHN BULL'S PAY-ROLL		184
A CHINESE ROMEO. A Short Story,	Charles Kroth Moser	185
The part played by a Chinese actor in real life.		
UNAPPRECIATED		190
THE ADVENTURES OF FELIX BOYD. A Series,	Scott Campbell	191
XI.—The House of Silence.		
THE WAY OF THE WEST. A Short Story,	Roland Ashford Phillips	205
A study of a man in a tight place.		
A VOW OF SILENCE		208
THE ROCKSPUR NINE. A Serial Story,	Burt L. Standish	209
The climax of a great baseball story.		

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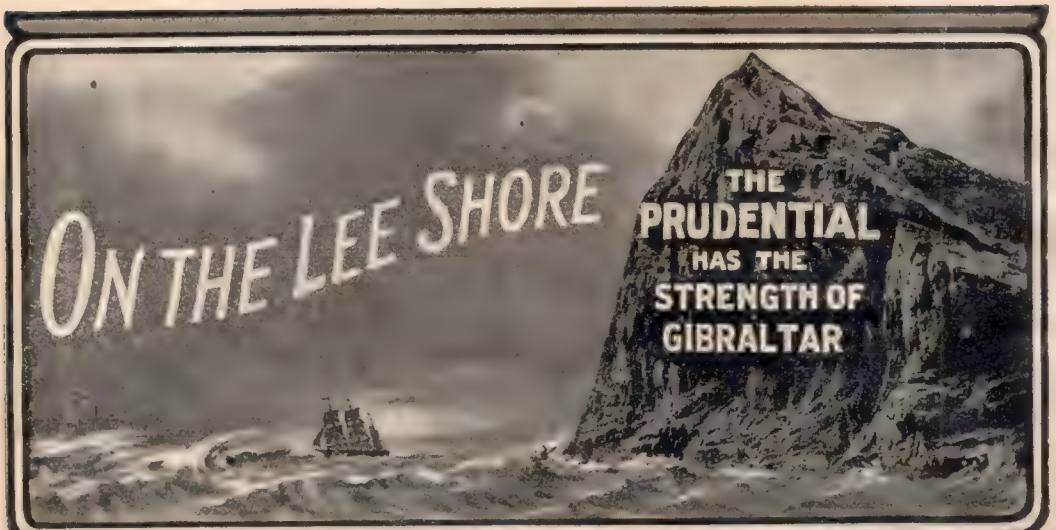
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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. VII.

DECEMBER, 1906.

No. 2.

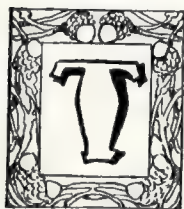
The King of Arcadia

By Francis Lynde

Author of "The Empire Builders," "The Grafters," Etc.

We are glad that it is possible for us to open the enlarged POPULAR with this novel by Mr. Lynde. It is, of course, beyond the bounds of possibility to write a story that will appeal to everybody, but we think "The King of Arcadia" comes as near to being such a story as any ever written. It is a remarkable piece of work—unique in plot, unparalleled in interest. The action centers around the building of a great dam in Colorado.

(A Complete Novel)



HE frantic rush of the day of suddenly changed plans was over. Ballard had telephoned to have his baggage transferred from the West India Line dock to the

Causeway Street Terminal; and with Gardiner, the assistant professor of geology, to bid him Godspeed, had gotten as far as the station-platform gates when Lassley's telegram, like a detaining hand stretched forth in the dark, brought him to a stand.

He read it, with a little frown of perplexity sobering his clean-cut, strenuous face:

TO BRECKENRIDGE BALLARD, care GATEMAN, CAUSEWAY STREET TERMINAL, BOSTON.

You love life and crave success. Arcadia irrigation has killed its originator and two chiefs of construction. It will kill you. Let it alone.

LASSLEY.

"Now, what would you make of that?" he asked, passing the telegram on to Gardiner.

The assistant in geology adjusted his eye-glasses, scanned the typewritten lines, and returned the square of yellow paper without suggestive comment.

"I make nothing of it, because my field is too prosaic. There are no assassinations in geology. What does it mean?"

The young engineer shook his head.

"I have no more idea than the man in the moon. I didn't suppose Lassley had ever heard of Arcadia before I named it to him this morning in a wire telling him of my changed plans."

"I thought the Lassleys were in Europe," said Gardiner.

"They sail to-day in the *Carania* from New York. My wire was to wish them a safe voyage, and I gave them my prospective address. That is how Lassley happens to know where I am going."

"But it does not explain the warning. Is it true that the Colorado irrigation scheme has killed three of its promoters?"

"Oh, a novelist might put it that way,

I suppose," said Ballard impatiently. "Braithwaite, of the Geodetic Survey, was the man who conceived the idea of making a storage reservoir at the head of the Boiling Water and turning the park into a farming district. He interested Mr. Pelham and a few other Denver capitalists, and went out as chief engineer to stand the scheme on its feet. Shortly after he had laid the foundations for the big dam, he fell into the Boiling Water and was drowned."

"One," said Gardiner, checking the unfortunate Braithwaite off on his fingers.

"Then Billy Sanderson took it—you remember Billy, in my year? He made the preliminary survey for a railroad over the mountains and into the park, and put a few more stones on Braithwaite's dam. As they say out yonder on the edge of things, he died with his boots on: got into trouble about a camp-following woman, and was shot."

"Two," checked the assistant in geology. "Who was the third?"

"A dour-faced, grizzly-headed old Scotchman named Macpherson. He took up the work where Billy Sanderson dropped it; built the railroad over the range and through the park to the headquarters camp at the dam, and lived to see the dam itself something more than half-completed."

"And what happened to Mr. Macpherson?" queried Gardiner.

"He was killed a few weeks ago by having a derrick fall on him. It raised quite a discussion in the technical periodicals. A wire guy cable rotted off—'rusting off,' the newspaper report said; and there was a howl from the wire-rope makers, who protested that a cable made of galvanized wire couldn't 'rust off.'"

"None the less, Mr. Macpherson was killed," observed the professor dryly. "That would seem to be the persisting fact in the discussion. Do none of these things move you?"

"Certainly not," scoffed the younger man. "I shall neither fall into the river nor stand under a derrick whose guy lines are unsafe."

Gardiner's smile was a mere eye-wrinkle of good-natured cynicism.

"You carefully omit poor Sanderson's fate. One swims out of a torrent—if he can—and one might possibly be able to dodge a falling derrick. But who can escape the toils of the woman 'whose hands are as bands, and whose feet——'?"

"Bosh!" said the Kentuckian; and then he laughed aloud. "There is one woman in the world, my dear Herr Professor, for whose sake I might stand up to be shot at; and she isn't in Colorado by a good many hundred miles."

"No? Nevertheless, Breckenridge, my son, there lies your best chance of making the fourth in the list of sacrifices. You are a Kentuckian; an ardent and chivalric Southerner. If the fates really wish to interpose in opposition to the Arcadian scheme, they will once more bait the trap with a woman—always presupposing, of course, that there are any fates, and that they have ordinary intelligence."

Ballard grinned.

"I'm in no danger on that score. Bromley—he was Sanderson's assistant, and afterward Macpherson's—wrote me that the Scotchman's first edict was one of banishment for every woman in the construction-camps."

"If he had only banished the derricks at the same time," commented Gardiner. Then he added: "You may be sure the fates will find you a woman, Breckenridge; the oracles have spoken. What would Arcadia be without its shepherdess? But we are jesting when Lassley appears to be very much in earnest. Could there be anything more than coincidence in these fatalities?"

"How could there be?" demanded Ballard. "Two sheer accidents, and one commonplace tragedy, which last was the fault—or the misfortune—of poor Billy's temperament, I take it, though he was a sober enough fellow when he was here learning his trade. I'll live, and I'll finish building the Arcadian dam. But never mind Lassley and his cryptogram; what I was trying to impress on your mind when

he butted in was that you were not to forget your promise to come out and loaf with me in August. You shall have the best a construction-camp affords, and you can geologize to your heart's content in virgin soil."

"That sounds very enticing," said the potential guest. "And, besides, I am interested in dams—and in wire cables that give way at inopportune moments. If I were you, I should make it a point to lay that broken guy cable aside. It might make interesting matter for an article in the *Engineer*; say, 'On the Effect of the Atmosphere in High Altitudes on Galvanized Wire.'"

Ballard laughed. "I believe you'd have your joke if you were dying. I'll keep the broken cable for you, and the pool where Braithwaite was drowned, and Sanderson's inamorata—only I suppose Macpherson obliterated her at the earliest possible. Say, by Jove! that's my train he's calling. Good-by, and don't forget your promise."

And but for a base-runner's dash across the platforms, Ballard would have lost the reward of the strenuous day of plan-changings at the final moment.

II.

It was on the Monday afternoon that Ballard made the base-runner's dash through the station gates in the Boston terminal, and stood on the rearmost platform of his outgoing train to watch for the passing of a certain familiar suburb where, at the home of the hospitable Lassleys, he had first met Miss Craigmiles.

On the Wednesday evening following he was gathering his belongings in the sleeper of a belated Chicago train preparatory to another dash across platforms—this time in the echoing station at Council Bluffs to catch the waiting Overland Flyer for the run to Denver.

President Pelham's telegram, which had found him in Boston on the eve of closing a contract with the sugar magnates to go and build refineries in Cuba, was quite brief, but it bespoke haste:

We need a fighting man who can build railroads and dams and dig ditches in Arcadia. Salary satisfactory to you. Wire quick if you can come.

This was the wording of it; and at the evening hour of train-changing in Council Bluffs, Ballard was sixteen hundred miles on his way, racing definitely to a conference with the president in Denver, with the warning telegram from Lassley no more than a vaguely disturbing underthought.

What lay beyond the conference he did not know in detail. As a man in touch with the moving world of great projects, he knew of the plan for the reclamation of the Arcadian aridnesses.

A dam was in process of construction, the waters of a mountain torrent were to be impounded, a system of irrigation canals opened, and an outlet railway built. Much of the work, he understood, was already done; and he was to take charge as chief of construction and carry it to its conclusion.

So much President Pelham's summons made clear. But what was the mystery hinted at in Lassley's telegram? And did it have any connection with that phrase in President Pelham's wire: "We need a fighting man?"

These queries were presenting themselves afresh when Ballard followed the porter to the section reserved for him in the Denver sleeper.

The car was well filled, and when he could break away from the speculative entanglement long enough to look about him, he saw that the women passengers were numerous enough to make it more than probable that he would be asked later to give up his lower berth to one of them.

Being man-selfish, and a seasoned traveler withal, he was steeling himself to say "No" to this request what time the train was rumbling over the bridge to Omaha.

At the Omaha station there was fresh influx of passengers for the Denver car, and to Ballard's dismay they appeared to be all women.

"Oh, good Lord!" he ejaculated; and

finding his pipe he beat a hasty retreat in the direction of the smoking-compartment, vaguely hoping to postpone the inevitable.

At the turn around the corner of the linen locker he looked back. Two or three figures in the group of late-comers might have asked for recognition if he had looked at them; but he had eyes for only one: a modish young woman in a veiled hat and a shapeless gray traveling-coat, who was evidently trying to explain something to the Pullman conductor.

"Jove!" he exclaimed; "if I didn't know for certain that Elsa Craigmiles is half-way across the Atlantic with the Lassleys—but she is; and if she were not, she wouldn't be here, doing the 'personally conducted' for that mob." And he went on to smoke.

It was a very short while afterward when an apologetic Pullman conductor found him, and the inevitable came to pass.

"This is Mr. Ballard, I believe?"

A nod and an uphanging of tickets.

"Thanks. I don't like to discommode you, Mr. Ballard; but you have an entire section, and——"

"I know," said Ballard crisply. "The lady got on the wrong train, or she bought the wrong kind of ticket, or she took chances on finding the good-natured fellow who would give up his berth and go hang himself on a clothes-hook in the vestibule. I've been there before, but I haven't learned how to say 'No.' Fix it up anyway you like, only don't give me an upper over a flat-wheeled truck, if you can help it."

An hour farther along came the call to dinner in the dining-car; and Ballard, who had been poring over a set of maps and profiles and typewritten documents mailed to intercept him at Chicago, brought up the rear of the outgoing dinner group from the Denver car.

In the vestibule of the diner he found the steward wrestling suavely with a late contingent of hungry ones, and explaining that the tables were all temporarily full. Ballard had broad shoulders and the Kentucky stature to match

them. Looking over the heads of the others, he marked a tête-à-tête table at the farther end of the car with one vacant place.

"Beg pardon—there's only one of me," he cut in; and the steward let him pass. When he had taken the vacant seat he found himself confronting a young woman in a veil-covered hat and a gray box-coat; not a chance-born double of Miss Elsa Craigmiles, but Miss Craigmiles herself.

"Why, Mr. Ballard, of all things!" she cried, with a brow-arching of surprise, real, or most artistically simulated. And then, in mock consternation: "Don't tell me you are the good-natured gentleman I drove out of his section in the sleeping-car."

"I sha'n't; because I don't know how many more there are of me," said Ballard. Then pure astonishment demanded its due. "Did I only dream that you were going to Europe with the Herbert Lassleys, or——"

She made a charming little face at him.

"Do you never change your mind suddenly, Mr. Ballard? No, you needn't confess: I know you do. Well, so do I. At the last moment I begged off, and Mrs. Lassley fairly scolded. She even went so far as to accuse me of not knowing my own mind two minutes at a time."

Ballard's smile was almost grim.

"You have given me that impression now and then; when I wanted to be serious and you did not. Did you come aboard with that party at Omaha?"

"Did I not? It's my—that is, it's cousin Janet Van Bryck's party; and we are going to do Colorado this summer. Think of that, as an exchange for England and a yachting-trip to Tromsö!"

This time Ballard's smile was affectionately cynical.

"I didn't suppose you ever forget yourself so far as to remember that there was any America west of the Allegheny Mountains."

Miss Elsa's laugh was one of her most effective weapons. Ballard was made to feel that he had laid himself

open at some vulnerable point, without knowing how or why.

"Dear me!" she gasped. "How long does it take you to get really acquainted with people?" Then, with reproachful demureness: "The man has been waiting for five full minutes to take your dinner order."

One of Ballard's gifts was pertinacity; and after he had told the waiter what to bring, he returned to her question.

"It is taking me long enough to get acquainted with you," he ventured. "It will be two years next Thursday since we first met at the Herbert Lassleys', and you have been awfully sweet and chummy with me—when you felt like it. Yet do you know you have never once gone back of your college days in speaking of yourself? I don't know to this good moment whether you ever had any girlhood; and that being the case——"

"Oh, spare me!" she begged, in well-counterfeited dismay. "One would think——"

"One would not think anything of you that he ought not to think," he broke in gravely; adding: "We are a long way past the Alleghenies now, and I am glad you are aware of an America somewhat broader than it is long. Do I know any of your sightseers, besides Mrs. Van Bryck?"

"I'll list them, and you can see," she offered. "There are Major Blacklock, United States Engineers, retired, who always says, 'H'm—ha!' before he contradicts you; the major's nieces, Madge and Margery Cantrell—the idea of splitting one name for two girls in the same family!—and the major's son, Jerry, most hopeful when he is pitted against other young savages on the football-field. All strangers, so far?"

Ballard nodded, and she went on.

"Then there are Mrs. Van Bryck and Dosia—I know you have met them; and Hetty Bigelow, their cousin twice removed, whom you have never met, if cousin Janet could help it; and Hetty's brother, Lucius, who is something or other in the forestry department. Let me see; how many is that?"

"Eight," said Ballard, "counting the negligible Miss Bigelow and her civil-service brother."

"Good. I merely wanted to see if you were paying attention. Last, but by no means least, there is Mr. Wingfield—the Mr. Wingfield, who writes plays."

Without ever having been suffered to declare himself Miss Elsa's lover, Ballard resented the saving of the playwright for the climax; also the tone in which his name was paraded.

"Let me remember," he said, with the frown reflective. "I believe it was Jack Forsyth the last time you confided in me. Is it Mr. Wingfield now?"

"You are quite too incorrigible," she laughed; but he made sure there was a blush to go with the laugh. "Do you expect me to tell you about it here and now?—with Mr. Wingfield sitting just three seats back of me, on the right."

Ballard scowled, looked as directed, and took the measure of his latest rival.

Wingfield was at a table for four with Mrs. Van Bryck, her daughter, and a shock-headed young man, whom Ballard took to be the football-playing Blacklock.

In defiance of the clean-shaven custom of the moment, or, perhaps, because he was willing to individualize himself, the playwright wore a beard closely trimmed and pointed in the French manner; this, and the quick-grasping eyes, and a certain vulpine showing of white teeth when he laughed, made Ballard liken him to an unnamed singer he had once heard in the part of *Mephistopheles* in "Faust."

The overlooking glance necessarily included Wingfield's table companions: Mrs. Van Bryck's high-bred contours lost in adipose; Dosia's cool and placid prettiness—the passionless charms of unrelieved milk-whiteness of skin and masses of flaxen hair and baby-blue eyes; the Blacklock boy's square shoulders, heavy jaw, and rather fine eyes—which he kept resolutely in his plate.

At the next table Ballard saw a young man with the brown of an outdoor occupation richly coloring face and

hands; an old one with the contradictory "H'm—ha!" written at large in every gesture; and two young women who looked as if they might be the sharers of the single Christian name. Miss Bigelow he did not identify.

"Well?" said Miss Craigmiles, seeming to intimate that he had looked long enough.

"I shall know Mr. Wingfield, if I ever see him again," remarked Ballard. "Whose guest is he? Or are you all Mrs. Van Bryck's?"

"What an idea!" she scoffed. "Cousin Janet is going into the absolutely unknown. She doesn't reach even to the Alleghenies; her America stops at Philadelphia. She is the chaperon; but our host isn't with us. We are to meet him in the wilds of Colorado."

"Anybody I know?" queried Ballard.

"No. And—oh, yes, I forgot; Professor Gardiner is to join us later. I knew there must be one more somewhere. But he was an afterthought. I—Cousin Janet, I mean—got his acceptance by wire at Omaha."

"Gardiner is not going to join you," said Ballard, with the cool effrontery of a proved friend. "He is going to join me."

"Where? In Cuba?"

"Oh, no; I am not going to Cuba. I am going to live the simple life; build dams and dig ditches in Arcadia."

He was well used to her swiftly changing moods. What Miss Elsa's critics, who were chiefly of her own sex, spoke of disapprovingly as her flightiness, was to Ballard one of her individualizing charms. Yet he was quite unprepared for her frankly reproachful question:

"Why aren't you going to Cuba? Didn't Mr. Lassley telegraph you not to go to Arcadia?"

"He did, indeed. But what do you know about it?—if I may venture to ask."

For the first time in their two years' acquaintance he saw her visibly embarrassed. And her explanation scarcely explained.

"I—I was with the Lassleys in New

York, you know; I went to the steamer to see them off. Mr. Lassley showed me his telegram to you after he had written it."

They had come to the little coffees, and the other members of Miss Craigmiles' party had risen and gone rearward to the sleeping-car. Ballard, more mystified than he had been at the Boston moment when Lassley's wire had found him, was still too considerate to make his companion a reluctant witness. Moreover, Mr. Lester Wingfield was weighing upon him more insistently than the mysteries. In times past she had made him a target for certain little arrows of confidence; he gave her an opportunity to do it again.

"Tell me about Mr. Wingfield," he suggested. "Is he truly Jack Forsyth's successor?"

"How can you doubt it?" she retorted gaily. "Some time—not here or now—I will tell you all about it."

"'Some time,'" he repeated. "Is it always going to be 'some time'? You have been calling me your friend for a good while, but there has always been a closed door beyond which you have never let me penetrate. And it's not my fault, as you intimated a few minutes ago. Why is it? Is it because I'm only one of many? Or is it your attitude toward all men?"

She was knotting her veil, and her eyes were downcast when she answered him.

"A closed door? There is, indeed, my dear friend—two hands, one dead and one still living, closed it for us. It may be opened some time"—the word persisted, and she could not get away from it—"and then you will be sorry. Let us go back to the sleeping-car. I want you to meet the others." Then, with a quick return to mockery: "Only I suppose you will not care to meet Mr. Wingfield?"

He tried to match her mood; he was always trying to keep up with her kaleidoscopic changes of front.

"Try me, and see," he laughed. "I guess I can stand it, if he can."

And a few minutes later he had been presented to the other members of the

sightseeing party, had taken Mrs. Van Bryck's warm fat hand of welcome and Dosia's cool one, and was successfully getting himself contradicted at every other breath by the florid-faced old campaigner, who, having been a major of engineers, was contentiously critical of young civilians who had taken their S. B. elsewhere than at West Point.

III.

It was shortly after midnight that the Overland Flyer came to a stand behind a freight train which was blocking the track at the blind siding at Coyote. Always a light sleeper, Ballard was aroused by the jar and grind of the sudden stop. After lying awake and listening for a time, he got up and dressed and went forward to see what had happened.

The accident was a box-car derailment, caused by a broken truck, and the men of both train crews were at work trying to get the disabled car back upon the steel and the track-blocking train out of the flyer's way. Since such problems were acutely in his line, Ballard thought of offering to help; but there seemed to be no special need, and he sat down on the edge of the ditch-cutting to look on.

The night was picture-fine; starlit, and with the silent wideness of the great upland plain to give it immensity. The wind, which for the first hundred miles of the westward flight had whistled shrilly in the car ventilators, was now lulled to a whispering zephyr, pungent with the subtle soil essence of the grass-land spring.

Ballard found a cigar and smoked it absently. His eyes followed the toilings of the train crews prying and heaving under the derailed car, with the yellow torch flares to pick them out; but his thoughts were far afield, with his dinner-table companion to beckon them.

"Companion" was the word which fitted her better than any other. Ballard had found few men, and still fewer women, completely companionable.

Some one has said that comradeship is the test of affinity; and the Kentuckian remembered with thrillings of delight a summer fortnight spent at the Herbert Lassleys' cottage on the North Shore, with Miss Craigmiles as one of his fellow guests.

Margaret Lassley had been good to him, holding the reins of chaperonage lightly. There had been sunny afternoons on the breezy headlands, and blood-quickenings mornings in Captain Tinkham's schooner-rigged whale-boat, when the white horses were racing across the outer reef and the water was too rough to tempt the other members of the house-party.

He had monopolized her crudely during those two weeks, glorying in her beauty, in her bright mind, in her purely physical fitness uniting the strength and the suppleness of a silken cord.

He remembered how sturdily their comradeship had grown in the two uninterrupted weeks. He had told her all there was to tell about himself, and in return she had alternately mocked him and pretended to confide in him; the confidences touching such sentimental passages as the devotion of the Toms, the Dicks, and the Harrys of her college years.

Since he had sometimes wished to be sentimental on his own account, Ballard had been a little restive under these frivolous appeals for sympathy. But there is a certain tonic for growing love even in such bucketings of cold water as the loved one may administer in telling the tale of the predecessor.

It is a cold heart, masculine, that will not be warmed by anything short of the ice of indifference; and whatever her faults, Miss Elsa was never indifferent.

Ballard recollected how he had groaned under the jesting confidences. Also, he remembered that he had never dared to repel them, choosing rather to clasp the thorns than to relinquish the rose.

From the sentimental journey past to the present stage of the same was but a step; but the present situation was rather perplexingly befogged. Why had Elsa Craigmiles changed her mind

so suddenly about spending the summer in Europe? What could have induced her to substitute a summer in Colorado, traveling under Mrs. Van Bryck's wing?

The answer to these queryings summed itself up, for the Kentuckian, in a name—the name of a man and a playwright. He held Mr. Lester Wingfield responsible for the changed plans, and was irritably resentful.

In the after-dinner visit with the sightseeing party in the Pullman there had been straws to indicate the set of the wind. Elsa deferred to Wingfield, as the other women did; only in her case Ballard was sure it meant more. And the playwright, between his posings as a literary oracle, assumed a quiet air of proprietorship in Miss Craigmiles that was maddening.

Ballard recalled this, sitting upon the edge of the ditch-cutting in the heart of the fragrant night, and figuratively punched Mr. Wingfield's head. Fate had been unkind to him, throwing him thus under the wheels when the missing of a single train for the sightseers or himself would have spared him.

Taking that view of the matter, there was grim comfort in the thought that the mangling could not be prolonged. The two orbits coinciding for the moment would shortly go apart again; doubtless upon the morning's arrival at Denver. It was well. Heretofore he had been asked to sympathize only in a subjective sense. With another lover corporeally present and answering to his name, the torture would become objective—and blankly unendurable.

Notwithstanding; he was looking forward with keen desire to one more meeting with the beloved tormentor—a table exchange of thoughts and words at the dining-car breakfast which he promised himself not all the playmakers in a mumming world should forestall or interrupt.

This determination was shaping itself masterfully in the Kentuckian's brain when, after many futile backings and slack-takings, the ditched car was finally induced to climb the frogs and to drop successfully upon the rails.

When the obstructing train began to move, Ballard flung away the stump of his cigar and climbed the steps of the first open vestibule on the flyer, making his way to the rear between the sleeping emigrants in the day-coaches.

Being by this time hopelessly wakeful, he filled his pipe and sought the smoking-compartment of the sleeping-car. It was a measure of his abstraction that he did not remark the unfamiliarity of the place; all other reminders failing, he should have realized that the fat negro porter working his way perspiring with brush and polish paste through a long line of shoes was not the man to whom he had given his suit-cases in the Council Bluffs terminal.

Thinking pointedly of Elsa Craigmiles, and of the joy of sharing another meal with her, in spite of the Lester Wingfields, he saw nothing, noted nothing; and the reverie, now frankly traversing the field of sentiment, ran on unbroken until he became vaguely aware that the train had stopped and started again, and that during the pause there had been sundry clankings and jerkings betokening the cutting off of a car.

A hasty question shot at the fat porter cleared the atmosphere of doubt.

"What station was that we just passed?"

"Short Line Junction, sah; whah we leaves the Denver cyar—yes, sah."

"What! Isn't this the Denver car?"

"No, indeed, sah. Dish yer cyar goes on th'oo to Ogden; yes, sah."

Ballard sat down again and laughed. He was not without a saving sense of humor. What with midnight prowlings and sentimental reveries he had managed to sever himself most abruptly and effectually from his car, from his hand-baggage, from the prefigured breakfast, with Miss Elsa for his vis-à-vis; and, what was of vastly greater importance, from the chance of a day-long business conference with President Pelham!

"Gardiner, old man, you are a true prophet; it isn't in me to think girl and to play the great game at one and the

same moment," he said, apostrophizing the associate professor of geology; and the fat porter said: "Sah?"

"I was just asking what time I shall reach Denver, going in by way of the main line and Cheyenne," said Ballard, with cheerful mendacity.

"Erbout t'ree o'clock in the afte'-noon, sah; yes, sah. Huccome you to get lef', Cap'n Boss?"

"I didn't get left; it was the Denver sleeper that got left," laughed the Kentuckian. After which he refilled his pipe, wrote a telegram to Mr. Pelham and one to the Pullman conductor about his hand-baggage, and resigned himself to the inevitable, hoping that the chapter of accidents had done its utmost.

Unhappily, it had not, as the day forthcoming amply proved. Reaching Cheyenne at late breakfast-time, Ballard found that the Denver train over the connecting-line waited for the Overland from the West; also, that on this day of all days, the Overland was hours behind her schedule.

Hence, there was haste-making extraordinary at the end of the Boston-Denver flight. President Pelham was waiting with his automobile to whisk the new chief off to a hurried dinner-table conference at the Brown Palace; and what few explanations and instructions Ballard got were sandwiched between the *consommé au gratin* and the small coffees.

Two items of information were grateful. The Fitzpatrick Brothers, favorably known to Ballard, were the contractors on the work; and Loudon Bromley, who had been his friend and loyal understudy in the technical school, was still the assistant engineer, doing his best to push the construction in the absence of a superior.

Since a chief in any sort stands or falls pretty largely by the grace of his subordinates, Ballard was particularly thankful for Bromley. He was little and he was young; he dressed like a dandy, wore patches of side-whisker, shot straight, played the violin, and stuffed birds for relaxation. But in spite of these hindrances, or, perhaps,

because of some of them, he could handle men like a born captain, and he was a friend whose faithfulness had been proved.

"I shall be only too glad to retain Bromley," said Ballard, when the president told him he could choose his own assistant. And, as time pressed, he asked if there were any special instructions.

"Nothing specific," was the reply. "Bromley has kept things moving, but they can be made to move faster, and we believe you are the man to set the pace, Mr. Ballard. And now, if you are ready, we have fifteen minutes in which to catch the Alta Vista train—plenty of time, but none to throw away. I have reserved your sleeper."

It was not until after the returning automobile spin, after Ballard had checked his baggage and had given his recovered suit-cases to the porter of the Alta Vista car, that he learned the significance of the fighting clause in the president's Boston telegram.

They were standing at the steps of the Pullman for the final word; had drawn aside to make room for a large party of still later comers; when the president said, with the air of one gathering up the unconsidered trifles:

"By the way, Mr. Ballard, you may not find it all plain sailing up yonder. Arcadia Park has been for twenty years a vast cattle-ranch, owned, or, rather, usurped, by a singular old fellow who is known as the 'King of Arcadia.' Quite naturally, he opposes our plan of turning the park into a well-settled agricultural field, to the detriment of his free cattle range, and he is fighting us."

"In the courts, you mean?"

"In the courts and out of them. I might mention that it was one of his cow-men who killed Sanderson; though that was purely a personal quarrel, I believe. The trouble began with his refusal to sell us a few acres of land and a worthless mining-claim which our reservoir may submerge, and we were obliged to resort to the courts. He is fighting for delay now, and encouraging his cowboys in a sort of

guerrilla warfare on the contractors: stealing tools, disabling machinery, and that sort of thing. This was Macpherson's story, and I'm passing it on to you. You are forty miles from the nearest sheriff's office over there; but when you need help, you'll get it. Of course, the company will back you—to the last dollar in the treasury, if necessary."

Ballard's rejoinder was placatory. "It seems a pity to open up the new country with a feud," he said, thinking of his native State and of what these little wars had done for some portions of it. "Can't the old fellow be conciliated in some way?"

"I don't know," replied the president doubtfully. "We want peaceable possession, if we can get it; capital is always on the side of peace. In fact, we authorized Macpherson to buy peace at any price in reason, and we'll give you the same authority. But Macpherson always represented the old cattle king as being unapproachable on that side. On the other hand, we all know what Macpherson was. He had a pretty rough tongue when he was at his best; and he was in bad health for a long time before the derrick fell on him. I dare say he didn't try diplomacy."

"I'll make love to the cow-punching princesses," laughed Ballard; "that is, if there are any."

"There is one, I understand; but I believe she doesn't spend much of her time at home. The old man is a widower, and, apart from his senseless fight on the company, he appears to be—but I won't prejudice you in advance."

"No, don't," said Ballard. "I'll size things up for myself on the ground. I—"

The interruption was the dash of a switch-engine up the yard with another car to be coupled to the waiting mountain-line train. Ballard saw the lettering on the medallion: "o—8."

"Somebody's private hotel?" he remarked.

"Yes. It is Mr. Brice's car, I guess. He was in town to-day."

Ballard was interested at once.

"Mr. Richard Brice?—the general manager of the D. & U. P.?"

The president nodded.

"That's luck," said Ballard warmly. "We were classmates in the technical school, and I haven't seen him since he came West. I think I'll ride in the 'hotel' till bedtime."

"Glad you know him," said the president. "Get in a good word for our connection with his line at Alta Vista, while you're about it. There is your signal; good-by, and good luck to you. Don't forget—'drive' is the word; for every man, minute, and dollar there is in it."

Ballard shook the presidential hand and swung up to the platform of the private car. A reluctant porter admitted him, and that is how it came about that he did not see the interior of his own sleeper until long after all the other passengers had gone to bed.

"Good load to-night, John?" he said to the porter, when the man was showing him to his made-down berth.

"Yes, sah; mighty good for de branch. But dey's a right smart of dem ladies, and dey don't he'p de po' portah much."

"Well, I'll pay for one of them, anyway," said the Kentuckian, good-naturedly doubling his tip. "Be sure you rout me out bright and early; I want to get ahead of the crowd."

And he wound his watch and went to bed, serenely unconscious that the hat upon the rail-hook next to his own belonged to Mr. Lester Wingfield; that the hand-bags over which he had stumbled in the dimly lighted aisle were the impedimenta of the ladies Van Bryck; or that the dainty little boots proclaiming the sex—and youth—of his fellow traveler in opposite No. 6 were the foot-gear of Miss Elsa Craigmiles.

IV.

Arcadia Park, as the government mapmakers have traced it, is a high-lying, enclosed valley in the heart of the middle Rockies, roughly circular in outline, with a curving westward sweep of the great range for one-half of its

circumscribing rampart, and the bent bow of the Taylor spur for the other.

Apart from storming the ramparting heights, accessible only to the hardy prospector or the forest ranger, there are three ways of approach to the shut-in valley; up the outlet gorge of the Boiling Water, across the Taylor range from the Roaring Fork, or over the high pass in the Continental Divide from Alta Vista.

It was from the summit of the high pass that Ballard had his first view of Arcadia. From Alta Vista the irrigation company's narrow-gage railway climbs through wooded gorges and around rock-ribbed snow balds, following the route of the old stage trail; and Ballard's introductory picture of the valley was framed in the cab window of the locomotive sent over by Bromley to transport him to the headquarters camp on the Boiling Water.

In the wide prospect opened by the surmounting of the high pass there was little to suggest the human activities, and still less to foreshadow strife. Ballard saw a broad-acred oasis in the mountain desert, billowed with undulating meadows, and having for its color scheme the gray-green of the range grasses.

Winding among the billowy hills in the middle distance, a wavering double line of aspens marked the course of the Boiling Water. Nearer at hand the bald slopes of the Saguache pitched abruptly to the forested lower reaches; and the path of the railway, losing itself at timber-line, reappeared far below as a minute scratch scoring the edge of the gray-green oasis, to vanish, distance-effaced, in a group of mound-shaped hills to the eastward.

The start from Alta Vista with the engine "special" had been made at sunrise, long before any of Ballard's fellow travelers in the sleeping-car were stirring. But the day had proved unseasonably warm in the upper snow-fields, and there had been time-killing delays.

Every gulch had carried its torrent of melted snow to threaten the safety of the unballasted track, and what with

snaillike inchings over the hazards and much shoveling of landslips in the cuttings, the sun was dipping to the westward range when the lumbering little construction engine clattered down the last of the inclines and found the long level tangents in the park.

On the first of the tangents the locomotive was halted at a watering-tank. Ballard climbed down from his cramped seat on the fireman's box and crossed the cab to the engineer's gangway. Hoskins, the engine-driver, leaning from his window, pointed out the projected course of the southern lateral canal in the great irrigation system.

"It'll run mighty nigh due west here, about half-way between us and the stage trail," he explained; and Ballard, looking in the direction indicated, said: "Where is the stage trail? I haven't seen it since we left the snow balds."

"It's over yonder in the edge of the timber," was the reply; and a moment later its precise location was defined by three double-seated buckboards, passenger-laden and drawn by four-in-hand teams of tittuping broncos, flicking in and out among the pines and pushing rapidly eastward. The distance was too great for recognition, but Ballard could see that there were women in each of the vehicles.

"Hello!" he exclaimed. "Those people must have come all the way from Alta Vista to-day. What is the attraction over here?—a summer-resort hotel?"

"Not any in this valley," said the engineman. "They might be going on over to Ashcroft, or maybe to Aspen, on the other side o' the Taylor. But if that's their notion, they're due to camp out somewhere, right soon. It's all o' forty mile to the nearest of the Roaring Fork towns."

The engine tank was filled, and the fireman was flinging the dripping spout to its perpendicular. Ballard took his seat again, and, because he was intently studying the topography of his new field, the singular spectacle of a party of tourists hastening on to meet night and the untaverned wilderness passed from his mind.

The approach to the headquarters camp of the Arcadia Company skirted the right bank of the Boiling Water, in this portion of its course a river of the plain, eddying swiftly between the aspen-fringed banks. But a few miles farther on, where the gentle undulations of the rich grass-land gave place to bare, rock-capped hills, the stream broke at intervals into noisy rapids, with deep pools to mark the steps of its descent.

Ballard's seat on the fireman's box was on the wrong side for the topographical purpose, and he crossed the cab to stand at Hoskins' elbow. As they were passing one of the stillest of the pools, the engineman said, with a sidewise jerk of his thumb:

"That's the place where Mr. Braithwaite was drowned. Came down here from camp to catch a mess o' trout for his supper and fell in—from the far bank."

"Couldn't he swim?" asked Ballard.

"They all say he could. Anyhow, it looks as if he might 'a' got out o' that little mill-pond easy enough. But he didn't. They found his fishin'-tackle on the bank, and him down at the foot of the second rapid below—both arms broke and the top of his head caved in, like he'd been run through a rock-crusher. They can say what they please; *I ain't believin' the river done it.*"

"What do you believe?" Ballard was looking across to a collection of low buildings and corrals—evidently the headquarters of the old cattle king's ranch outfit—nestling in a hill-sheltered cove beyond the stream, and the question was a mere fill-in.

"I believe this whole blame' job is a hoodoo," was the prompt rejoinder. And then, with the freedom born of long service in the unfettered areas where discipline means only obedience without servility, Hoskins added: "I wouldn't be standin' in your shoes this minute for all the money the Arcadia Company could pay me, Mr. Ballard."

Ballard was young, fit, vigorous, and in abounding health. Moreover, he was a typical product of an age which scoffs

at superstition and is impatient of all things irreducible to the terms of algebraic formulas. But here and now, on the actual scene of the fatalities, the "two sheer accidents and a commonplace tragedy" were less easily dismissed than when he had thus contemptuously named them for Gardiner in the Boston terminal. Notwithstanding, he was quite well able to shake off the little thrill of disquietude and to laugh at Hoskins' vicarious anxiety.

"I wasn't raised in the woods, Hoskins, but there was plenty of tall timber near enough to save me from being scared by an owl," he asseverated. Then, as two towering derrick-heads loomed gallowslike in the gathering dusk, with a white blotch of masonry to fill the ravine over which they stood sentinel: "Is that our camp?"

"That's her," said the engineer; and he shut off the steam and woke the hill echoes with the whistle.

Ballard made out something of the lay of the land about his headquarters while the engine was slowing through the temporary yard.

There was the orderly disorder of a construction terminal: tracks littered with cars of material, a range of rough sun-shelters for the stone-cutters, a dotting of sleeping-huts and adobes on a little mesa above, and a huge, weathered mess-tent, lighted within, and glowing orange-hued in the twilight.

Back of the camp the rounded hills grew suddenly precipitous, but through the river gap guarded by the twin derricks there was a vista distantly backgrounded by the mass of the main range rising darkly under its evergreens, with the lights of a great house starring the deeper shadow.

Bromley was on hand to meet his new chief when Ballard dropped from the step of the halted engine. A few years older, and browned to a tender mahogany by the sun of the altitudes and the winds of the desert, he was still the Bromley of Ballard's college memories; compact, alert, boyishly smiling, neat, and well-groomed. With Anglo-Saxon blood on both sides, the meeting could not be demonstrative.

"Same little old 'Beau Bromley,'" was Ballard's greeting to go with the hearty hand-grip; and Bromley's reply was in keeping. After which they climbed the slope to the mesa and the headquarters office in comradely silence.

Having picked up the engine "special" with his field-glass as it came down the final zigzag in the descent from the pass, Bromley had supper waiting in the adobe-walled shack which served as the engineers' quarters; and until the pipes were lighted after the meal there was little talk save of the golden past. But when the camp cook had cleared the table, Ballard reluctantly closed the book of reminiscence and gave the business affair its due.

"How are you coming on with the work, Loudon?" he asked. "Don't need a chief, do you?"

"Don't you believe it!" said the substitute, with such heartfelt emphasis that Ballard smiled. "I'm telling you right now, Breckenridge, I never was so glad to shift a responsibility since I was born. Another month of it alone would have turned me gray."

"And yet, in my hearing, people are always saying that you are nothing less than a genius when it comes to handling working men. Isn't it so?"

"Oh, that part of it is all right. It's the hoodoo that is making an old man of me before my time."

"The what?"

Bromley moved uneasily in his chair, and Ballard could have sworn that he gave a quick glance into the dark corners of the room before he said: "I'm giving you the men's name for it. But, with or without a name, it hangs over this job like the shadow of a devil-bat's wings. The men sit around and smoke and talk about it till bedtime, and the next day some fellow makes a bad hitch on a stone, or a team runs away, or a blast hangs fire in the quarry, and we have a dead man for supper. Breckenridge, it is simply hell!"

Ballard shook his head incredulously.

"You've let a few ill-natured coinci-

dences rattle you," was his comment. "What is it? Or, rather, what is at the bottom of it?"

"I don't know; nobody knows. The 'coincidences,' as you call them, were here when I came; handed down from Braithwaite's drowning, I suppose. Then Sanderson got tangled up with Manuel's woman—as clear a case of superinduced insanity as ever existed—and in less than two months he and Manuel got at it with Winchesters, and poor Billy passed out. That got on everybody's nerves, of course; and then Macpherson came. You know him—a hard-headed, sarcastic old Scotchman. He tried ridicule; and when that didn't stop the crazy happenings, he took to bullyragging. The day the derrick fell on him he was swearing at the hoister engineer; and he died with a curse in his mouth."

The Kentuckian sat back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his head.

"Let me get one thing straight before you go on. Mr. Pelham told me of a scrap between the company and an old fellow up here who claims everything in sight. Has this emotional insanity you are talking about anything to do with the old cattle king's objection to being syndicated out of existence?"

"No; only incidentally in Sanderson's affair—which, after all, was a purely personal quarrel between two men over a woman. And I wouldn't care to say that Manuel was wholly to blame in that."

"Who is this Manuel?" queried Ballard.

"Oh, I thought you knew. He is the colonel's manager and ranch foreman. He is a Mexican and an all-around scoundrel, with one lonesome good quality—absolute and unimpeachable loyalty to his master. The colonel turns the entire business of the cattle raising and selling over to him; doesn't go near the ranch once a month himself."

"The colonel," repeated Ballard. "You call him 'the colonel,' and Mr. Pelham calls him 'the King of Arcadia.' I assume that he has a name, like other men?"

"Sure!" said Bromley. "Hadn't you heard it? It's Craigmiles."

"What!" demanded Ballard, holding the match with which he was about to relight his pipe, until the flame crept up and scorched his fingers.

"That's it—Craigmiles; Colonel Adam Craigmiles—the King of Arcadia. Didn't Mr. Pelham tell you——"

"Hold on a minute," Ballard cut in; and he got out of his chair to pace back and forth on his side of the table while he was gathering up the pieces scattered broadcast by this explosive petard of a name.

At first he saw only the clearing up of the little mysteries shrouding Miss Elsa's suddenly changed plans for the summer; how they were instantly resolved into the commonplace and the obvious. She had merely decided to come home and play hostess to her father's guests. And since she knew about the war for the possession of Arcadia, and would quite naturally be sorry to have her friend pitted against her father, Ballard did not need to look further for the origin of Lassley's curiously worded telegram. "Lassley's," he called it; but if Lassley had signed it, it was fairly certain that Miss Craigmiles had dictated it.

Ballard thought it was womanlike for her to use the fatalities as an argument in the warning message. None the less, he held her as far above the influence of the superstitions as he held himself, and it was a deeper and more reflective second thought that turned a fresh leaf in the book of the mysteries.

Was it possible that the three violent deaths were not mere coincidences, after all? And, admitting design, could it be conceivable that Elsa Craigmiles was implicated, even to the guiltless degree of suspecting it? Ballard stopped short in his pacing sentry-beat and began to investigate, not without misgivings.

"Loudon, what sort of man is Colonel Craigmiles?"

Bromley's reply was characteristic of Bromley. "The finest ever—type of the American country gentleman;

suave, courteous, a little inclined to be grandiloquent; does the paternal with you till you catch yourself on the edge of saying 'sir' to him; and has the biggest, deepest, sweetest voice that ever drawled the Southern 'r's.'"

"Humph! That isn't the portrait of a fire-eater."

"Don't you make any mistake. I've described the man you'll meet socially. On the other side, he's a fighter from away back; the kind of man who makes no account of the odds against him; and he doesn't know when he's licked. He has told us openly and repeatedly that he will do us up if we swamp his house and his mine; that he will make it cost us the price of our entire investment in the dam. I believe he'll do it, too; but President Pelham won't back down an inch. So there you are—irresistible moving body; immovable, fixed body—the collision imminent; and we poor devils in between."

Ballard drew up his chair and sat down again. "You are miles beyond my depth now," he asserted. "I had less than an hour with Mr. Pelham in Denver, and what he didn't tell me would make a good-sized library. Begin at the front, and let me have the story of this feud between the company and Colonel Craigmiles."

Again Bromley said: "I supposed, of course, that you knew all about it"—after which he supplied the missing details.

"It was Braithwaite who was primarily responsible. When the company's plans were made public, the colonel did not oppose them, though he knew that the irrigation scheme spelled death to the cattle industry. The fight began when Braithwaite located the dam here at this gap in the foothill hogback. There is a better site farther down the river; a second depression where an earthwork dike might have taken the place of all this costly rockwork."

"I saw it as we came up this evening."

"Yes. Well, the colonel argued for the lower site; offered to donate three or four homesteads in it which he had

taken up through his employees; offered further to take stock in the company; but Braithwaite was pig-headed about it. He was a government man, and a crank on things permanent and monumental; wherefore he was set on building masonry. He ignored the colonel, reported on the present site, and the work was begun."

"Go on," said Ballard.

"Naturally, the colonel took this as a flat declaration of war. He has a magnificent country house in the upper valley which must have cost him, at this distance from a base of supplies, a round half-million or more. When we fill our reservoir, this house will stand on an island of less than an acre in extent, with its orchards, lawns, and ornamental grounds all under water. Which the same is tough."

Ballard was Elsa Craigmiles' lover, and he agreed in a single forcible expletive. Bromley acquiesced in the expletive, and went on.

"The colonel refused to sell his country house-holding, as a matter of course; and the company decided to take chances on the suit for damages which will follow the flooding of the property. Meanwhile, Braithwaite had organized his camp, and the foundations were going in. A month or so later, he and the colonel had a personal collision, and, although Craigmiles was old enough to be his father, Braithwaite struck him. There was blood on the moon, as you'd imagine. The colonel was unarmed, and he went home to get a gun. Braithwaite, who was always a cold-blooded brute, got out his fishing-tackle and sauntered off down the river to catch a mess of trout. He never came back alive."

Ballard was thinking altogether of Colonel Craigmiles' daughter when he said: "Good heavens! but the colonel couldn't have had any hand in Braithwaite's drowning!"

"Oh, no. At the time of the accident, the old man was back here at the camp, looking for Braithwaite with blood in his eye. They say he went crazy mad with disappointment when he found that the river had robbed him

of his right to kill the man who had struck him."

Ballard was silent for a time. Then he said: "You spoke of a mine that would also be flooded by our reservoir. What about that?"

"That came in after Braithwaite's death and Sanderson's appointment as chief engineer. When Braithwaite made his location here, there was an old prospect tunnel in the hill across the gulch. It was boarded up and apparently abandoned, and no one seemed to know who owned it. Later on it transpired that the colonel was the owner, and that the mining-claim, which was properly patented and secured, actually covers the ground upon which our dam stands. While Sanderson was busy brewing trouble for himself with Manuel, the colonel put three Mexicans at work in the tunnel; and they have been digging away there ever since."

"Gold?" asked Ballard.

Bromley laughed quietly.

"Maybe you can find out—nobody else has been able to. But it isn't gold; it must be something infinitely more valuable. The tunnel is fortified like a fortress, and one or another of the Mexicans is on guard day and night. The mouth of the tunnel is lower than the proposed level of the dam, and the colonel threatens all sorts of things, and tells us frankly that it will break the Arcadia Company financially when we flood that mine. I have heard him tell Mr. Pelham to his face that the water should never flow over any dam the company might build here; that he would stick at nothing to defend his property. Mr. Pelham says all this is only bluff; that the mine is worthless. But the fact remains that the colonel is immensely rich—and is apparently growing richer."

"Has nobody ever seen the inside of this Golconda of a mine?" queried Ballard.

"Nobody from our side of the fence. As I've said, it is guarded like the sultan's seraglio; and the Mexicans might as well be deaf and dumb for all you can get out of them. Macpherson, who stood for the company first, last, and

all the time, had an assay made from some of the stuff spilled out on the dump; but there was nothing doing, so far as the best analytical chemist in Denver could find out."

For the first time since the strenuous day of plan-changing in Boston, Ballard was almost sorry he had given up the Cuban undertaking.

"It's a beautiful tangle!" he snapped, thinking, one would say, of the breach that must be opened between the company's chief engineer and the daughter of the militant old cattle king. Then he changed the subject abruptly.

"What do you know about the colonel's household, Loudon?"

"All there is to know, I guess. He lives in state in his big country mansion that looks like a World's Fair Forest Products Exhibit on the outside, and is fitted and furnished regardless of expense in its interiors. He is a widower with one daughter—who comes and goes as she pleases—and a sister-in-law who is the dearest, finest piece of fragile old china you ever read about."

"You've been in the country house, then?"

"Oh, yes. The colonel hasn't made it a personal fight on the working force since Braithwaite's time."

"Perhaps you have met Miss—er—the daughter who comes and goes?"

"Sure I have! If you'll promise not to discipline me for hobnobbing with the enemy, I'll confess that I've even played duets with her. She discovered my weakness for music when she was home last summer."

"Do you happen to know where she is now?"

"On her way to Europe, I believe. At least, that is what Miss Cauffrey—she's the fragile-china aunt—was telling me."

"I think not," said Ballard, after a pause. "I think she changed her mind and decided to spend the summer at home. When we stopped at Ackerman's to take water this evening, I saw three loaded buckboards driving in this direction."

"That doesn't prove anything," asserted Bromley. "The old colonel has

a house-party every little while. He's no anchorite, if he does live in the desert."

Ballard was musing again. "Adam Craigmiles," he said thoughtfully. "I wonder what there is in that name to set some sort of bee buzzing in my head. If I believed in transmigration, I should say that I had known that name, and known it well, in some other existence."

"Oh, I don't know," said Bromley. "It's not such an unusual name."

"No; if it were, I might trace it. How long did you say the colonel had lived in Arcadia?"

"I didn't say. But it must be something over twenty years. Miss Elsa was born here."

"And the family is Southern—from what section?"

"I don't know that—Virginia, perhaps, measuring by the colonel's accent, pride, hot-headedness, and reckless hospitality."

The clue, if any there were, appeared to be lost; and again Ballard smoked on in silence. When the pipe burned out he refilled it, and at the match-striking instant the jar of a near-by explosion shook the air and rattled the windows.

"What was that?" he queried.

"It's our quarry gang getting out stone," was Bromley's reply. "We were running short of headers for the dam, and I put on a night-shift."

"Whereabouts is your quarry?"

"Just around the shoulder of the hill, and a hundred feet above us. It is far enough to be out of range."

A second explosion punctuated the explanation. Then there was a third and still heavier shock, a rattling of pebbles on the sheet-iron roof of the adobe, and a scant half-second later a fragment of stone the size of a man's head crashed through the ceiling and made kindling-wood of the light pine-table at which the two men were sitting. Ballard sprang to his feet, and said something under his breath; but Bromley sat still, with a faint yellow tint discoloring the sunburn on his face.

"Which brings us back to our start-

ing-point—the hoodoo,” he said quietly. “To-morrow morning, when you go around the hill and see where that stone came from, you’ll say it was a sheer impossibility. Yet the impossible thing has happened. It is reaching for you now, Breckenridge; and a foot or two farther that way would have——” He stopped, swallowed hard, and rose unsteadily. “For God’s sake, old man, throw up this cursed job and get out of here, while you can do it alive!”

“Not much!” said the new chief contemptuously. And then he asked which of the two bunks in the adjoining sleeping-room was his.

V.

Ballard’s first appraisive view of his new field of labor was had before breakfast on the morning following his arrival, and Bromley was his cicerone.

Seen in their entirety by daylight, the topographies appealed irresistibly to the technical eye; and Ballard no longer wondered that Braithwaite had overlooked or disregarded all other possible sites for the great dam.

The basin enclosed by the circling foot-hills, and backed by the forested slopes of the main range was a natural reservoir, lacking only a comparatively short wall of masonry to block the gap in the hills through which the river found its way to the lower levels of the grass-lands.

The gap itself was an invitation to the engineer. Its rock-bound slopes promised the best of anchorages for the shore-ends of the masonry; and at its lower extremity it was contracted to a mere chasm by a jutting promontory on the right bank of the stream.

Braithwaite had chosen the narrowest pass in the chasm as the site for his dam. Through the promontory he had driven a short tunnel at the river-level to provide a diverting spillway for the torrent; and by this simple expedient had secured a dry river-bed in which to build the great wall of concrete and masonry.

“That was Braithwaite’s notion, I suppose?” said Ballard, indicating the

tunnel through which the stream, at summer freshet volume, thundered on its way around the building-site to plunge sullenly into its natural bed below the promontory. “Nobody but a government man would have had the courage to spend so much time and money on a mere preliminary. It’s a good notion, though.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” was Bromley’s reply. “Kirkpatrick tells a fairy-story about the tunnel that will interest you when you hear it. He had the contract for driving it, you know.”

“What was the story?”

Bromley laughed. “You’ll have to get Mike to tell it, with the proper Irish frills. But the gist of it is this: You know these hogback hills—how they seem to be made up of all the geological odds and ends left over after the mountains were built. Mike swears they drove through limestone, sandstone, porphyry, fire-clay, chert, mica-schist, and *mud* digging that tunnel; which the same, if true, doesn’t promise very well for the foundations of our dam.”

“But the plans call for bed-rock under the masonry,” Ballard objected.

“Oh, yes; and we have it—apparently. But some nights, when I’ve lain awake listening to the peculiar hollow roar of the water pounding through that tunnel, I’ve wondered if Kirkpatrick’s streak of mud mightn’t underlie our bed-rock.”

Ballard’s smile was good-naturedly tolerant.

“You’d be a better engineer if you were not a musician, London. You have too much imagination. Is that the colonel’s country house up yonder in the middle of our reservoir—that-is-to-be?”

“It is.”

Ballard focused his field-glass upon the tree-dotted knoll a mile away in the center of the upper valley. It was an ideal building-site for the spectacular purpose. On all sides the knoll sloped gently to the valley level; and the river, a placid vale-land stream in this upper reach, encircled three sides of the little hill.

Among the trees, and distinguishable from them only by its right lines and gable-angles, stood a noble house, built, as it seemed, of great tree-trunks with the bark on.

Ballard could imagine the inspiring outlook from the brown-pillared Greek portico facing westward; the majestic sweep of the enclosing hills, bare and with their rock-crowns water-worn into a thousand fantastic shapes; the uplift of the silent, snow-capped mountains to right and left; the vista of the broad, outer valley opening through the gap where the dam was building.

"The colonel certainly had an eye for the picturesque when he pitched upon that knoll for his building-site," was his comment. "How does he get the water up there to make all that greenery?"

"Pumps it, bless your heart! What few modern improvements you won't find installed at Castle 'Cadia aren't worth mentioning. And, by the way, there is another grouch—we're due to drown his power-pumping and electric plant at the portal of the upper cañon under thirty feet of our lake. More bad blood, and a lot more damages."

"Oh, damn!" said Ballard; and he meant the imprecation, and not the pile of masonry which his predecessors had heaped up in the rocky chasm at his feet.

Bromley chuckled. "That is what the colonel is apt to say when you mention the Arcadia Company in his hearing. Do you blame him so very much?"

"Not I. If I owned a home like that, in a wilderness that I had discovered for myself, I'd fight for it to a finish. Last night, when you showed me the true inwardness of this mix-up, I was sick and sorry. If I had known five days ago what I know now, you couldn't have pulled me into it with a two-inch rope."

"On general principles?" queried Bromley curiously.

"Not altogether. Business is business; and you've intimated that the colonel is not so badly overmatched in the money field—and it is a money fight with the long purse to win. But there

is a personal reason why I, of all men in the world, should have stayed out. I did not know it when I accepted Mr. Pelham's offer, and now it is too late to back down. I'm a thousand times sorrier for Colonel Craigmiles than even you can be, Loudon; but, as the chief engineer of the Arcadia Company, I've got to obliterate him."

"That is precisely what he declares he will do to the company," laughed Bromley. "And there"—pointing across the ravine to an iron-bound door closing a tunnel entrance in the opposite hillside—"is his advanced battery. That is the mine I was telling you about."

"Humph!" said the new chief, measuring the distance with his eye. "If that mining-claim is the regulation size, it doesn't leave us much elbow-room over there."

"It doesn't leave us any—as I told you last night, the dam itself stands upon a portion of the claim. In equity, if there were any equity in a law-fight against a corporation, the colonel could enjoin us right now. He hasn't done it; he has contented himself with marking out that dead-line you can see over there just above our spillway. The colonel staked that out in Billy Sander-son's time, and courteously informed us that trespassers would be potted from behind that barricaded door. Just to see if he meant what he said, some of the boys rigged up a dummy, and carefully pushed it over the line one evening after supper. I wasn't here, but Fitzpatrick says the colonel's Mexican garrison in the tunnel fairly set the air afire with their fusillade."

Ballard said "Humph!" again, and was silent what time they were climbing the hill to the quarries on their own side of the ravine. When he spoke, it was not of the stone the night-shift had been getting out.

"Loudon, has it ever occurred to you that the colonel's mine-play is a very large-sized trump-card? We can submerge the house, grounds, and his improvements up yonder and know approximately how much it is going to cost the company to pay the bill. But

when the water backs up into that tunnel, we are stuck for whatever damages he cares to claim."

"Sure thing," said Bromley. "No one on earth will ever know whether we've swamped a five-million-dollar mine or a twenty-five-cent hole in the ground."

"That being the case, I mean to see the inside of that tunnel," Ballard went on doggedly. "I'm sorry I'm into this; but in justice to the people who pay my salary, I must know what we're up against over there."

"I don't believe you will make any bad breaks in that direction," Bromley amended. "If you try it by main strength and awkwardness, as Macpherson did, you'll get what he very narrowly escaped—a young lead-mine started inside of you by one of the colonel's Mexican bandits. If you try it any other way, the colonel will be sure to spot you; and you go out of his good books and Miss Elsa's—no invitations to the big house, no social alleviations, no ice-cream and cake, no heavenly summer nights when you can sit out on that Greek-pillared portico with a pretty girl, and forget for the moment that you are a buccaneering bully of laboring men; marooned, with a lot of dry-land pirates like yourself, in the Arcadia desert. No, my dear Breckenridge; you won't do anything you say you will."

"Won't I?" growled the new chief, looking at his watch. Then: "Let's go down to breakfast." And, with a sour glance at the hill over which the roof-smashing rock of the previous night must have been hurled: "Don't forget to tell Quinlan to be a little more sparing with his powder up here. Impress it on his mind that he is getting out building-stone—not shooting the hill down for concrete."

With this for the introduction to his new responsibilities, Ballard saw little enough of the headquarters camp during the fortnight following. While the principal operations were at the dam, there were many subsidiary camps of ditch-diggers and railroad-builders at various points in the park, and an in-

spection-tour was the first of many pressing duties.

Ballard quartered his field thoroughly, spending the better part of the two weeks in the saddle.

"No," he said to Bromley, on one of the few nights when he was able to make the headquarters camp for supper and lodging; "no, I'm too tired. Go calling, if you want to, but leave me out of the social game until I get my grip on the details. Later on, perhaps, I'll go with you and pay my respects to the colonel—but not now."

Bromley did go, and found that Ballard's guess about the loaded buckboards was a true saying: Castle 'Cadia was comfortably filled with a summer house-party; and Miss Craigmiles had given up her European trip to play the hostess. She had her guess about Ballard's refusal to present himself, and she confided it to Bromley.

"I know your new tyrant," she said; "I have known him for a long time. He won't come. He is afraid we might make him disloyal to his salt. You may tell him I said so, if you like."

But Ballard was asleep when Bromley returned to camp; was mounted and gone in the morning long before the "turn-out" whistle blew; for which cause Miss Elsa's challenge remained undelivered.

It was on these scouting gallops to the outlying camps that Ballard discovered the limitations of the "hoodoo," so-called. Its influence, he found, diminished as the square of the distance from the headquarters. But in the wider field there were hindrances of another sort.

Bourke Kirkpatrick, the younger of the contracting brothers, was in charge of the ditch-digging; and he had shrewd tales to tell of the lawless doings of Colonel Craigmiles' herdsmen.

"There isn't anything thim divils won't be up to, Misther Ballard," he complained. "Wan night they'll uncouple every wagon on the job, and t'row the couplin'-pins away; and the next, maybe, they'll be shtampedin' th' mules. Two weeks ago, on Dan Moriarty's section, they kem wid min and

horses in the dead o' night, hitched up the scrapers, and put a thousand yards of earth back into the ditch, afther Moriarty's gang had been two days diggin' it out."

"Wear it out good-naturedly, if you can, Bourke—it's only horse-play," was Ballard's advice.

"Horse-play, is it? Divil a bit. I can take a joke wid anny man; an' this is no joke."

"A night guard?" suggested the chief.

"We thried that, and you'll not get a man to go out since Dinny Flaherty tuk his medicine. Thim cow-punchers roped him and skidded him 'round over the perarie till it tuk wan of the min a whole blessed day to dig the cactus splinters out of him, begor!"

Ballard's reply expressed some doubt of Bromley's defense of the colonel's fighting methods.

"If it isn't horse-play, it's guerrilla warfare, Bourke. Have you seen anything to make you believe that these fellows have a tip from the big house?"

The Irishman shook his head.

"The colonel don't figure in annything wid the cow business. 'Tis Manuel; and the greaser is in this as big as annybody. Flaherty'll take oath that Manuel was wid the gang that roped him."

It was the same story at all of the ditching-camps; and Ballard passed from placatory counsel to cursings. "I'll run a sheriff's posse in here and clean up the entire outfit!" he was saying wrathfully to himself as he galloped eastward on the stage trail late in the afternoon of the third day. "God knows I don't want to make a blood-feud of it, but if they will have it——"

The interruption was a little object-lesson illustrating the grievance of the contractors. Roughly paralleling the stage trail ran the line of the southern lateral canal, marked by its double row of location-stakes. At a turn in the road Ballard came suddenly upon what appeared to be an impromptu game of tent-pegging.

Flap-hatted herdsmen in shaggy overalls, and swinging long clubs in lieu

of mallets, were riding in curious zig-zags over the canal course, and bending for the drive at each right and left swerve of their wiry little mounts.

It took the Kentuckian a full minute to master the intricacies of the game. Then he saw what was doing. The location-stakes for the ditch boundaries were set opposite and alternately, and the object of the dodging riders was to determine which of them could club the greatest number of stakes out of the ground without missing the blow or drawing rein.

Ballard singled out the leader, a small, dark-skinned man under a bullion-corded sombrero, and rode into the thick of things, red wrath to the fore.

"Hi! you there!" he shouted. "Is your name Manuel?"

"*Si, señor,*" was the mild reply; and the little man bowed to his saddle-horn.

"Well, mine is Ballard, and I am the chief engineer for the Arcadia Company."

"Ha! Señor Ballar', I am ver' much delight' to meet you."

"Never mind that; the pleasure isn't mutual, by a damned sight. You tell your men to stop that monkey-business, and have them put those stakes back where they found them." Ballard was hot.

"You give-a the h-order in this valley, señor?" asked the Mexican softly.

"I do, where the company's property is concerned. Call your men off!"

The foreman's beady black eyes snapped viciously.

"Señor Ballar', I have biffed this killed a man for that he spik to me like-a that!"

"Have you?" snorted Ballard contemptuously. "Well, you won't kill me. Call your men off, I say!"

There was no need. The makeshift tent-pegging game had paused, and the riders were gathering about the quarreling two.

"Bat your left eye oncet, and we'll rope him for you, Manuel," said one. "Wonder if I c'd skiddoo that hat o' his'n without mussin' his hair!" said

another. "Oh, you fellers wait a minute till I make that bronc' o' his'n do a cake-walk!" interposed a third, casting the loop of his riata on the ground so that Ballard's horse would be thrown if he lifted hoof.

It was an awkward crisis, and the engineer stood to come off with little credit. He was armed, but even in the unfettered cattle country one cannot pistol a laughing jeer. It was the saving sense of humor that came to his aid, banishing red wrath. There was no malice in the jeers.

"Sail in when you're ready, boys," he laughed. "I fight for my brand the same as you'd fight for yours. Those pegs have got to go back in the ground where you found them."

One of the flap-hatted riders dropped his reins, drummed with his elbows, and crowed lustily. The foreman backed his horse deftly out of the enclosing ring; and the man nearest to Ballard on the right made a little cast of his looped rope, designed to whip Ballard's pistol out of its holster. If the engineer had been the tenderfoot they took him for, the trouble would have culminated quickly.

With the laugh still on his lips, the Kentuckian was watching every movement of the Mexican. There was blood-thirst, waiting only for the shadow of an excuse, glooming in the beady black eyes.

Ballard thought of Sanderson, and a quick thrill of racial sympathy for the dead man tuned him to the fighting pitch. It was suddenly borne in upon him that the Mexican was of the type known to the West as a "killer"; a man whose regard for human life could be accurately measured by his chance for escaping the penalty for its taking.

It was at this climatic moment, while Ballard was tightening his eye-hold upon the one dangerous antagonist, and foiling with his free hand the attempts of the playful "Scotty" at his right to disarm him, that the diversion came. A dust-cloud on the near-by stage trail resolved itself into a fiery-red, purring motor-car with a single occupant; and a moment later the car had left the

road and was heading across the grassy interspace.

Manuel's left hand was hovering above his pistol-butt; and Ballard took his eyes from the menace long enough to glance quickly at the up-coming motorist. He was a kingly figure of a man well on in years, ruddy of face, white-haired, with huge military mustaches and a goatee. He brought the car with a skilful turn into the midst of things; and Ballard, confident now that the Mexican foreman no longer needed watching, saw a singular happening.

The old man in the motor-car stared hard at him while one might count two, rose in his place, staggered, groped with his hands as the blind grope, and sank back into the driving-seat with a groan.

Ballard was off his horse on the instant, tendering his pocket-flask. But the King of Arcadia recovered himself immediately.

"Thank you, suh," he said in a voice that boomed for its very depth and sweetness; "I reckon I've been driving a little too fast. Youh—youh name is Ballard—Breckenridge Ballard, isn't it?" he inquired courteously, ignoring the dissolving ring of practical jokers.

"It is. And you are Colonel Craig-miles?"

"At youh service, suh; entiahly at youh service. I should have known you anywhere for a Ballard. Youh mother was a Hardaway, but you don't take aftuh that side. No, suh"—with calm deliberation—"you are youh father's son, Mistuh Ballard." Then, as one coming at a bound from the remote past to the present: "Was thah any—ah—little discussion going on between you and—ah—Manuel, Mistuh Ballard?"

Five minutes earlier the engineer had been angry enough to prefer charges against the tent-peggers all and singular. But the booming of the deep voice had a curiously mollifying effect.

"It is hardly worth mentioning," he found himself replying. "I was protesting to your foreman because the boys were having a little horse-play at our expense—knocking our location-stakes out of the ground."

The kingly old man in the motor-car drew himself up, and there was a mild explosion directed at the Mexican foreman.

"Manuel, I'm suhprised—right much suhprised and humiliated, suh! I thought it was—ah—distinctly undehtood that all this schoolboy triflin' was to be stopped. Let me heah no more of it. And see that these heah stakes are replaced; carefully replaced, if you please, suh." And then to the complainant: "I'm right sorry, I assure you, Mistuh Ballard. Let me prove it by carrying you off to dinneh with us at Castle 'Cadia. Grigsby, heah, will lead youh horse to camp, and fetch any little necessities you might care to send for. Indulge me, suh, and let me make amends. My daughter speaks of you so often that I feel we ought to be mo' friendly." And he made room in the driving-seat of the runabout.

Under much less favorable conditions it is conceivable that the Kentuckian would have overridden many barriers for the sake of finding an open door at Castle 'Cadia. And, the inspection-tour being completed, there was no duty-call to sound a warning.

"I shall be delighted, I'm sure," he burbled, like any infatuated lover; and when the cowboy messenger was charged with the errand to the headquarters camp, Ballard took his place beside the company's enemy, and the car was made to pick its way gingerly across to the hill-skirting stage road.

It was a ten-mile run to the bowl-shaped valley behind the foot-hills; and the colonel, mindful, perhaps, of his late seizure, did not speed the motor-car.

Recalling it afterward, Ballard remembered that the talk never approached the conflict in which he and his host were the principal antagonists. Miss Elsa's house-party, the matchless climate of Arcadia, the scenery, Ballard's own recollections of his Kentucky boyhood—all these were made to do duty; and the colonel's smile was so winning, his deep voice so sympathetic, and his attitude so affectionately paternal, that Ballard found his mental picture of a fierce old frontiersman

fighting for his squatter rights fading to the vanishing-point.

"Diplomacy," Mr. Pelham had suggested; and Ballard smiled inwardly. If it came to a crossing of diplomatic weapons with this keen-eyed, gentle-voiced patriarch, who seemed bent upon treating him as an honored guest, the company's cause was as good as lost.

The road over which the auto-car was silently trundling avoided the headquarters camp at the dam by several miles, losing itself among the hogback foot-hills well to the southward, and approaching the inner valley at right angles to the course of the river and the railway.

The sun had sunk behind the western mountain barrier, and the dusk was gathering when the colonel quickened the speed, and the car topped the final hill in a purring rush. Ballard heard the low thunder of the Boiling Water in its upper cañon, and had glimpses of weird shapes of eroded sandstone looming in huge pillars and fantastic mushroom figures in the growing darkness.

Then the lights of Castle 'Cadia twinkled in their tree-setting at the top of the little knoll; the drought-hardened road became a graveled carriage-drive under the air-cushioned wheels; and a final burst of speed sent the car to the summit of the hill through a maple-shadowed avenue.

The great tree-trunk-pillared portico of the country house was deserted when the colonel throttled the motor at the carriage step. But a moment later a white-gowned figure appeared in the open doorway.

"Why, Mr. Ballard—I'm shocked!" said a laughing voice. "Have you really decided that it is quite safe to trust yourself in the camp of the enemy?"

VI.

Ballard had seen Castle 'Cadia at field-glass range; and he had Bromley's enthusiastic description of the house of marvels to push anticipation some little distance along the way to meet the ar-

tistic reality. None the less, the reality came with the shock of the unexpected.

In the softened light of shaded electric pendants, the massive pillars of the portico appeared as single trees standing as they had grown in the mountain forest. Underfoot the floor was of hewn tree-trunks; but the house walls, like the pillars, were of logs in the rough, cunningly matched and fitted to conceal the carpentry.

A man had come to take the automobile, and the colonel paused to call attention to a needed adjustment of the motor. Ballard made use of the isolated moment.

"I have accounted for you at last," he said, prolonging the welcoming hand-clasp to the ultimate limit. "I know now what has made you what you are."

"Really?" she questioned lightly. "And all these years I have been vainly imagining that I had acquired the manner of the civilized East! Isn't it pathetic?"

"Very," he agreed quite gravely. "But the pathos is all on my side."

"Meaning that I might let you go and dress for dinner? I shall. Enter the house of the enemy, Mr. Ballard. A cow-punching princess bids you welcome."

She was looking him fairly in the eyes when she said it, and he acquitted her instantly of the charge of intention. But the accidental use of his own phrase was sufficiently disconcerting to make him awkwardly silent when she led the way into the spacious reception-hall.

Here the spell of the enchantments laid fresh hold upon him. The rustic exterior of the great house was only the artistically designed contrast—with in there was richness, refinement, luxury unbounded.

The floors were of polished wood, and the rugs were costly Daghestans. Beyond portières of curious Indian beadwork, there were vistas of harmonious interiors; carved furnishings, beamed and paneled ceilings, book-lined walls. The light everywhere came

from the softly tinted globes. There was a great stone fireplace in the hall, but modern radiators flanked the openings, giving an added touch of modernity.

Ballard pulled himself together and strove to recall the fifty-mile, sky-reaching mountain barrier lying between all this twentieth century country house luxury and the nearest approach to urban civilization. It asked for a tremendous effort; and the realizing anchor dragged again when Miss Craigmiles summoned a Japanese servant and gave him in charge.

"Show Mr. Ballard to the red room, Tagawi," she directed. And then to the guest: "We dine at seven—as informally as you please. You will find your bag in your room, and Tagawi will serve you. As you once told me when I teased you in your Boston workshop—'If you don't see what you want, ask for it.'"

The Kentuckian followed his guide up the broad stair and through a second-floor corridor which abated no jot of the down-stair magnificence. Neither did his room, for that matter. Hangings of Pompeian red gave it its name; and it was spacious and high-studded, and critically up to date in its appointments.

The little brown serving man deftly opened the bag brought by the colonel's messenger from Ballard's quarters at the dam, and laid out the guest's belongings. That done, he opened the door of the bath. "The honorable excellency will observe the hot water; also cold. Are the orders other for me?"

Ballard shook his head, dismissed the smiling little man, and turned on the water.

"I reckon I'd better take it cold," he said to himself; "then I'll know for certain whether I'm awake or dreaming. By Jove! but this place is a poem! I don't wonder that the colonel is fighting Berserk to save it alive. And Mr. Pelham and his millionaires come calmly up to the counter and offer to buy it—with mere money!"

He filled the porcelain bath with a

crystal-clear flood that, measured by its icy temperature, might have been newly distilled glacier drip; and the cold plunge did something toward establishing the reality of things. But the incredibilities promptly reasserted themselves when he went down a little in advance of the house-party guests, and met Elsa, and was presented to a low-voiced lady with silvery hair and the face of a chastened saint, named to him as Miss Cauffrey, but addressed by Elsa as "Aunt June."

"I hope you find yourself somewhat refreshed, Mr. Ballard," said the soft-voiced chatelaine. "Elsa tells me you have been in the tropics, and our high altitudes must be almost distressing at first; I know I found them so."

"Really, I hadn't noticed the change," returned Ballard rather vaguely. Then he bestirred himself, and tried to live up to the singularly out-of-place social requirements. "I'm not altogether new to the altitudes, though I haven't been in the West for the past year or two. For that matter, I can't quite realize that I am in the West at this moment—at least in the uncited part of it."

Miss Cauffrey smiled, and the king's daughter laughed softly.

"It does me so much good!" she declared, mocking him. "All through that dining-car dinner on the Overland Flyer you were trying to reconcile me with the Western barbarities. Didn't you say something about being hopeful because I was aware of the existence of an America west of the Alleghenies?"

"Please let me down as easily as you can," pleaded the engineer. "You must remember that I am only a plain working man."

"You are come to take poor Mr. Macpherson's place?" queried Miss Cauffrey; which was Ballard's first intimation that the Arcadian promotion scheme was not taboo by the entire household of Castle 'Cadia.

"That is what I supposed I was doing, up to this evening. But it seems that I have stumbled into fairy-land instead."

"No," said Elsa, laughing at him

again—"only into the least Arcadian part of Arcadia. And after dinner you will be free to go where you are impatient to be at this very moment."

"I don't know about that," was Ballard's rejoinder. "I was wondering a few minutes ago if I could be heroic enough to go contentedly from all this to my adobe shack in the construction-camp."

Miss Craigmiles mocked him again. "My window in the Alta Vista sleeper chanced to be open that night while the train was standing in the Denver station. Didn't I hear Mr. Pelham say that the watchword—your watchword—was 'drive,' for every man, minute, and dollar there was in it?"

Ballard started guiltily, and a hot flush rose to humiliate him, in spite of his efforts to keep it down. Now it was quite certain that her word of welcome was not a mere coincidence. She had overheard that brutal and uncalled-for boast of his about making love to "the cow-punching princesses"; and this was his punishment.

It was a moment for free speech of the explanatory sort, but Miss Cauffrey's presence forbade it. So he contented himself with saying, in a voice that might have melted a heart of stone: "I am wholly at your mercy—and I am your guest. You shouldn't step on a man when he's down. It isn't Christian."

Whether she would have stepped on him or not was left a matter indeterminate, since the members of the house-party were coming down by twos and threes, and shortly afterward dinner was announced.

Ballard was growing a little hardened to the surprises; and the exquisitely appointed dining-room evoked only a left-over thrill. And at table, in the intervals allowed him by Miss Van Bryck, there were other things to think of. For example, he was curious to know if Wingfield's air of proprietorship in Miss Craigmiles would persist under Colonel Craigmiles' own roof.

Before the first course was removed his curiosity was in the way of being amply satisfied; and he was saying

"Yes" and "No" like a well-adjusted automaton to Miss Van Bryck.

In the seating he had Major Blacklock and one of the Cantrell girls for his opposites; and Lucius Bigelow and the other sharer of the common Cantrell Christian name widened the gap. But the centerpiece in the middle of the great mahogany was low; and Ballard could see over it only too well.

Wingfield and Elsa were discussing playmaking and the playmaker's art; or, rather, Wingfield was talking shop with cheerful dogmatism, and Miss Craigmiles was listening; and if the rapt expression of her face meant anything. . . . Ballard lost himself in gloomy abstraction; and the colors of the solar spectrum suddenly merged for him in a greenish-gray.

"I should think your profession would be perfectly grand, Mr. Ballard. Don't you find it so?" Thus Miss Dosia, who, being quite devoid of subjective enthusiasm, felt constrained to try to invoke it in others.

"Very," said Ballard, hearing nothing save the upward inflection which demanded a reply.

"H'm—ha! What's that you're saying?" scoffed the major, who had chanced to catch Miss Van Bryck's bit of gush and Ballard's absent-minded rejoinder.

"I beg your pardon, major," said Ballard, wondering acutely what provocation he had unwittingly given; and the major let him off for the time.

"With all the world of material things to conquer," murmured Miss Van Bryck; "and no one to ask what you think or what you know—only what you can do."

"Yes; quite so," agreed the Kentuckian.

This time the major only glared, but his silence was so evidently premonitory of an explosion that Dosia hastened to change the subject.

"Has any one told you that Mr. Wingfield is making the studies for a new play?" she asked.

Again Ballard marked the rising inflection; said "Yes," at a venture; and

was properly humiliated, as he deserved to be.

"It seems so odd that he should come out here for his material," she went on evenly. "I don't begin to understand how there can be any dramatic possibilities in a wilderness house-party, with positively no social setting whatever."

"Ah, no; of course not," stammered Ballard, realizing now that he was fairly at sea. And then, to make matters as bad as they could be: "You were speaking of Mr. Wingfield?"

Miss Van Bryck's large blue eyes mirrored faint astoundment; but she was too placid and too good-natured to be genuinely piqued.

"I fear you must have had a hard day, Mr. Ballard. All this is very wearisome to you, isn't it?" she said, letting him have a glimpse of the vast kindness underlying the inanities.

"My day has been rather strenuous," he admitted. "But you make me ashamed. Won't you be merciful and try me again?" And this time he knew what he was saying, and meant it.

"It is hardly worth repeating," she qualified—nevertheless, she did repeat it.

Ballard, listening now, found the little note of distress in the protest against play-building in the wilderness; and his heart warmed to Miss Dosia. In the sentimental field, disappointment for one commonly implies disappointment for two; and he became suddenly conscious of a fellow-feeling for the heiress of the Van Bryck millions.

"There is plenty of dramatic material in Arcadia for Mr. Wingfield, if he knows where to look for it," he submitted. "Our camp at the dam furnishes a 'situation' every now and then." And he told the story of the catapulted stone, adding the pinch of mystery to give it the dramatic flavor.

Miss Dosia's interest was as eager as her limitations would permit. "May I tell Mr. Wingfield?" she asked, with such innocent craft that Ballard could scarcely restrain a smile.

"Certainly. And if Mr. Wingfield is

open to suggestion on that side, you may bring him down, and I'll put him on the trail of a lot more of the mysteries."

"Thank you, so much. And may I call it my discovery?"

Again her obviousness touched the secret spring of laughter in him. It was very evident that Miss Van Bryck would do anything in reason to bring about a solution of continuity in the sympathetic intimacy growing up between the pair on the opposite side of the table.

"It is yours absolutely," he made haste to say. "I should never have thought of the dramatic utility if you hadn't suggested it."

"H'm—ha!" broke in the major. "What are you two young people plotting about over there?"

Ballard turned the edge of the query; blunted it permanently by attacking a piece of government engineering in which, as he happened to know, the major had figured in an advisory capacity.

This carrying of the war into Africa brought on a battle technical which ran on unbroken to the ices and beyond; to the moment when Colonel Craigmiles proposed an adjournment to the portico for the coffee and the cigars. Ballard came off second best, but he had accomplished his object, which was to make the shrewd-eyed old major forget if he had overheard too much; and Miss Van Bryck gave him his meed of praise.

"You are a very brave young man, Mr. Ballard," she said, as he drew the portières for her. "Everybody else is afraid of the major."

"I've met him before," laughed the Kentuckian; "in one or another of his various incarnations. And I didn't take my degree at West Point, you know."

The summer night was perfect, and the gathering under the great portico became rather a dispersal. The company fell apart into couples and groups when the coffee was served; and while Miss Craigmiles and the playwright were still fraying the worn threads of

the dramatic unities, Ballard consoled himself with the elder of the Cantrell girls, talking commonplace nothings until his heart ached.

Later on, when young Bigelow had relieved him, and he had given up all hope of breaking into the dramatic duet, he rose to go and make his parting acknowledgments to Miss Cauffrey and the colonel. It was at that moment that Miss Elsa confronted him.

"You are not going?" she said. "The evening is still young—even for country folk."

"Measuring by the hours I've been neglected, the evening is old, very old," he retorted reproachfully.

"Which is another way of saying that we have bored you until you are sleepy?" she countered. "But you can't go yet—I want to talk to you." And she wheeled a great wicker lounging-chair into a quiet corner, and beat up the pillows in a near-by hammock, and bade him smoke his pipe if he preferred it to the Castle 'Cadia cigars.

"I don't care to smoke anything if you will stay and talk to me," he said, love quickly blotting out the disappointments foregone.

"For this one time you may have both; your pipe and me. Are you obliged to go back to your camp to-night?"

"Yes, indeed. I ran away, as it was. Bromley will have it in for me for dodging him this way."

"Is Mr. Bromley your boss?"

"He is something much better—he is my friend."

Her hammock was swung diagonally across the quiet corner, and she arranged the pillows so that the shadow of a spreading potted palm came between her eyes and the nearest electric globe.

"Am I not your friend, too?" she asked.

Jerry Blacklock and the younger Miss Cantrell were pacing a slow sentry-beat up and down the open space in front of the lounging chairs; and Ballard waited until they had made the turn and were safely out of ear-shot

before he said: "There are times when I have to admit it, reluctantly."

"How ridiculous!" she scoffed. "What is finer than true friendship?"

"Love," he said simply.

"Cousin Janet will hear you," she warned. Then she mocked him, as was her manner. "Does that mean that you would like to have me tell you about Mr. Wingfield?"

He played trumps again.

"Yes. When is it to be?"

"How crudely elemental you are tonight! Suppose you ask me?"

"He hasn't given me the right."

"Oh! And I have?"

"You are trying to give it to me, aren't you?"

She was swinging gently in the hammock, one slippered foot touching the floor.

"You are so painfully direct at times," she complained. "It's like a cold shower-bath; invigorating but shivery. Do you think Mr. Wingfield really cares anything for me? I don't, you know. I think he regards me only as so much literary material. He lives from moment to moment in the hope of discovering 'situations.'"

"Well?"—tentatively. "I am sure he has chosen a most promising subject—and surroundings. Arcadia reeks with dramatic possibilities, I should say."

Her face was still in the shadow of the branching palm, but her changed tone betrayed the changed mood.

"I have often accused you of having no insight—no intuition," she said musingly. "Yet you have a way of groping blindly to the very heart of things. How could you know that it has come to be the chief object of my life to keep Mr. Wingfield from becoming interested in what you flippantly call 'the dramatic possibilities'?"

"I didn't know it," he returned.

"Of course you didn't. Yet it is true. It is one of the reasons why I gave up going with the Herbert Lassleys after my passage was actually taken in the *Carania*. Cousin Janet's party was made up. Dosia and Jerry Blacklock came down to the steamer

to see us off. Dosia told me that Mr. Wingfield was included. You have often said that I have the courage of a man—I hadn't then. I was horribly afraid."

"Of what?" he queried.

"Of many things. You would not understand if I should try to explain them."

"I do understand," he hastened to say. "But you have nothing to fear. Castle 'Cadia will merely gain an ally when Wingfield hears the story of the little war. Besides, I was not including your father's controversy with the Arcadia Company in the dramatic material; I was thinking more particularly of the curious and unaccountable happenings that are continually occurring on the work—the accidents, you know."

"There is no connection between the two—in your mind?" she asked. She was looking away from him, and he could not see her face. But the question was eager; almost pathetic.

"Assuredly not," he denied promptly. "Otherwise——"

"Otherwise you wouldn't be here tonight, as my father's guest, you would say. But others are not as charitable. Mr. Macpherson was one of them. He charged all the trouble to us, though he could prove nothing. He said that if all the circumstances were made public——" She faced him quickly, and he saw that the beautiful eyes were full of trouble. "Can't you see what would happen—what is likely to happen if Mr. Wingfield sees fit to make literary material out of all these miseries?"

The Kentuckian nodded. "The unthinking, newspaper-reading public would probably make one morsel of the accidents and your father's known antagonism to the company. But Wingfield would be something less than a man and a lover if he could bring himself to the point of making literary capital out of anything that might remotely involve you or your father."

She shook her head doubtfully.

"You don't understand the artistic temperament. It's a passion. I once heard Mr. Wingfield say that a true

artist would make copy out of his grandmother."

Ballard scowled. It was quite credible that the Lester Wingfields were lost to all sense of the common decencies, but that Elsa Craigmiles should be in love with the sheik of the caddish tribe was quite beyond belief.

"I'll choke him off for you," he said; and his tone took its color from the contemptuous underthought. "But I'm afraid I've already made a mess of it. To tell the truth, I suggested to Miss Van Bryck at dinner that our camp might be a good hunting-ground for Wingfield."

"You said that to Dosia?" There was something like suppressed horror in the low-spoken query.

"Not knowing any better, I did. She was speaking of Wingfield, and of the literary infertility of house-parties in general. I mentioned the camp as an alternative—told her to bring him down and I'd— Good heavens! what have I done?"

Even in the softened light of the electric globes he saw that her face had become a pallid mask of terror; that she was swaying in the hammock. He was beside her instantly; and when she hid her face in her hands, his arm went about her for her comforting—this, though Wingfield was chatting amiably with Mrs. Van Bryck no more than three chairs away.

"Don't!" he begged. "I'll get out of it some way—lie out of it, fight out of it, if needful. I didn't know it meant anything to you. If I had—Elsa, dear, I love you; you've known it from the first. You can make believe with other men as you please, but in the end I shall claim you. Now tell me what it is that you want me to do."

Impulsively she caught at the caressing hand on her shoulder, kissed it, and pushed him away with resolute strength.

"You must never forget yourself again, dear friend—or make me forget," she said steadily. "And you must help me as you can. There is trouble—deeper trouble than you know or suspect. I tried to keep you out of it—

away from it; and now you are here, in Arcadia, to make it worse—ininitely worse. You have seen me laugh and talk with the others, playing the part of the woman you know, or think you know. Yet there is never a waking moment when the burden of anxiety is lifted."

He mistook her meaning, as who could help?

"You needn't be anxious about Wingfield's material hunt," he interposed. "If Miss Dosia takes him to the camp, I'll see to it that he doesn't hear any of the ghost-stories."

"That is only one of the anxieties," she went on monotonously. "The greatest of them is—for you."

"For me? Because——"

"Because your way to Arcadia lay over three graves. That means nothing to you—does it also mean nothing that your life was imperiled within an hour of your arrival at your camp?"

He drew the big chair nearer to the hammock and sat down again.

"Now you are letting Bromley's imagination run away with yours. That rock came from our quarry. There was a night gang getting out stone for the dam."

She laid her hand softly on his knee.

"Do you want to know how much I trust you? That stone was thrown by a man who was standing upon the high bluff back of your headquarters. He thought you were alone in the office, and he meant to kill you. Don't ask me who it was, or how I know—I *do* know."

Ballard started involuntarily. It was not in human nature to take such an announcement calmly.

"Do you mean to say that I was coolly hunted down before I could——"

She silenced him with a quick little gesture. Blacklock and Miss Cantrell were still pacing their sentry-beat, and the major's "H'm—ha!" rose in irascible contradiction above the hum of voices. Beyond the zone of light narrowed by the maples on the lawn there were sounds as of some animal bursting its way through the shrubbery. A moment later, out of the enclosing void

of the night, came a man, breathing hard. It was a laborer from the camp at the dam, and he touched his hat to the lady in the hammock.

"'Tis Misther Ballard I'm lukin' for," he said; and Ballard answered for himself.

"What is it?" he asked.

"It's Misther Bromley, this time, sorr. The wather was risin', and he'd been up to the wing dam just below this to see was there anny logs or annything cloggin' it. On the way back to camp he did be stooblin' in the dark into the cañon; and the dago, Lu'gi, found him." The man was mopping his face with a red bandanna, and his hands were trembling.

"Is he badly hurt?" Ballard had stepped quickly between the hammock and the bearer of tidings.

"'Tis kilt dead he is, sorr, we're thinkin'," was the awed reply.

Ballard heard a horrified little gasp behind him, and the hammock suddenly swung empty. When he turned, Elsa was coming out through the porte-cochère entrance with his hat.

"Go with the man!" she commanded. "Don't wait for anything! I'll explain to father and Aunt June. Hurry! hurry! but, oh, do be careful—*careful!*"

Ballard vaulted the low balustrade at the end of the portico and plunged into the shrubbery at the heels of the messenger. When he looked back from the turn in the carriage-drive, she had disappeared.

"What is it, child? What has happened?"

Miss Cauffrey had been dozing in her chair, but she wakened suddenly when Elsa spoke to her.

"It is another accident at the construction-camp. Mr. Ballard had to go immediately. Where is father?"

Miss Cauffrey put up her eyeglasses and scanned the various groups within eye-reach. Then she remembered. "Oh, yes; I think I must be very sleepy yet. He passed me quite a little time ago, on his way to the library to lie down. He asked me to call

him when Mr. Ballard was ready to go."

"Are you sure of that, Aunt June?"

"Why—yes. No, that wasn't it—he asked me to excuse him to Mr. Ballard. I recollect now. Dear me, child! what has upset you so? You look positively haggard."

But Elsa had fled; first to the library, which was empty, and then to her father's room on the upper floor. That was empty, too, but the coat and vest her father had worn earlier in the evening were lying upon the bed. Almost immediately she heard his step in the corridor. When he came in she scarcely recognized him. He was muffled to the heels in a long raincoat, the muscles of his face were twitching, and he was gasping like a spent runner.

"Father!" she said softly; but he either did not hear or did not heed. He had flung the raincoat aside and was hurriedly struggling into the evening dress. When he turned from the dressing-mirror she could hardly keep from crying out. With the swift change of raiment he had become himself again; and a few minutes later, when she found him lying peacefully on the reading lounge in the library, half-asleep, as it seemed, the transformation scene in the upper room became more than ever like the fleeting impression of a dream.

"Father, are you asleep?" she called; and he sat up at once. She told him her tidings without preface.

"Mr. Bromley is hurt—fatally, they think—by a fall into the lower cañon. Mr. Ballard has gone with the man who came for him. Will you send Otto with the car to see if there is anything we can do?"

"Bromley? Oh, no, child; it can't be *Bromley!*" He had risen to his feet at her mention of the name, but now he sat down again as if the full tale of the years had smitten him suddenly. Then he gasped out his directions: "Tell Otto to bring the car around at—*at once*. Of cou'se, I shall go myself"—this in response to her protest—"I'm quite well and able—just a little—little sho'tness of breath. Fetch

my coat and the doctor-box, thah's a good girl. But—but I tell you it can't be—Bromley."

VII.

Bromley's principal wounding proved to be a pretty seriously broken head, got, so said Luigi, the river watchman who had picked him up, by the fall from the steep hill-path into the cañon.

Like most engineers with field experience, Ballard was a rough surgeon; but beyond cleansing the wound and telegraphing by way of Denver to Aspen for help, there was little he could do.

The telegraphing promised nothing. Cutting out all delays, and assuming the Aspen physician's willingness to undertake a night drive over a hazardous mountain trail, it would take at least twelve hours in which to cover the forty miles.

Ballard counted the fluttering pulse and shook his head despairingly. Since he had lived so long, Bromley might linger until midnight; or the flickering candle might go out with the next breath.

To the Kentuckian in this sore strait came an angel of healing in the guise of his late entertainer. There was the stuttering staccato of a motor-car breasting the mesa hill, the drumming of the released engines at the door, and the colonel strode in, followed by Jerry Blacklock, who had driven the car by the roundabout road from Castle 'Cadia. Without a word, the first gentleman of Arcadia laid off his coat, opened a kit of surgeon's tools, and saved Bromley's life, temporarily, at least, by skilfully lifting the broken bone, which was pressing him to death.

"Thah, suh," he said; and the melodious voice filled the adobe shack until every resonant thing within the sound of it seemed to vibrate in harmony; "thah, suh; what mo' there is to do can't be done to-night. To-morrow morning, Mistuh Ballard, you will make a litteh and have him carried up to Castle 'Cadia, and among us all we'll try to ansuh for him. Not a word,

my deah suh; it's only what that boy would do for the poorest one of us. I tell you, Mistuh Ballard, we've learned to think right much of the boy; yes, suh, right much."

Ballard said what was meet, and spoke of the Aspen-aimed telegram.

"Countehmand it, suh; countehmand it. We'll pull him through without calling in the neighbors. Living heah, in such close proximity to youh man-mangling institutions, I've had experience enough durin' the past year or two to give me standing as a regular practitioneh." And his mellow laugh was like the booming of bees among the clover heads.

"I don't doubt it," said Ballard. And then he thanked young Blacklock for coming.

"It was up to me, wasn't it, Colonel Craigmiles?" said the collegian. "Otto—Otto's the shover, you know—flunked his job; said he wouldn't be responsible for anybody's life if he had to drive the road in the night. We drove it, all right, and we'll drive it back, won't we, colonel?"

The King of Arcadia put a hand on Ballard's shoulder and pointed at Blacklock.

"That young cub, suh, hasn't any mo' horse sense than one of youh dago mortah-mixers, but the way he drives a motor-car is scandalous. Why, suh, if my hair hadn't been white when we started, it surely would be now."

Ballard went to the door with the Good Samaritans, saw the colonel safely mounted, and followed the winding course of the car until the jiggling tail-light had crossed the temporary bridge below the camp, to be lost among the opposing hills. The elder Fitzpatrick was at his elbow when he turned to go in.

"There's hope f'r him, Misther Ballard?" he inquired anxiously.

"Good hope now, I think, Michael."

"That's the brave word. The min are sittin' up in th' bunk shanties to hear ut. 'Twas all through the camp the minute they brought him in. There isn't a man of thim that wouldn't go through fire and wather f'r Misther

Bromley. Is there annything I can do?"

"Nothing, thank you. Tell the yard watchman to stay within call, and I'll send for you if you're needed."

Ballard kept his vigil alone, sitting where he could see the face of the unconscious victim of fate, or tramping three steps and a turn in the adjoining office room when sleep threatened.

It was a time for calm second thought; for a reflective weighing of the singular and ominous conditions partly revealed in the interrupted talk with Elsa. That she knew more than she was willing to tell was plainly evident; but beyond this assumption the unanswerable questions clustered thickly, opening door after door of speculative outreachings in the background.

What was the motive behind the catapulted stone? Ballard had always been too busy to make enemies; therefore, the attempt upon his life must have been impersonal—it was directed at the chief engineer of the Arcadia Company. Assuming so much, the chain of inference linked itself rapidly. Was Macpherson's death purely accidental?—or Braithwaite's? If not, who was the murderer?—and why was Elsa determined to shield him?

The answer pointed to one man—her father—and thereby became a thing to be scoffed at. It was more than incredible; it was impossible.

The Kentuckian was practical before all things else. Villains of that dye did not exist, save in the drivings of the novelist or the playwright. And if by any stretch of imagination they might be supposed to exist—

Ballard brushed the supposition impatiently aside when he thought of Elsa. It was only in the cheap romance that heredity was ignored; that the pure, sweet stream of unblemished maidenhood had its rise in the turbid and poisonous fountain-head.

"Anything but that," he said, breaking the silence of the four bare walls to hear the sound of his own voice. "And, besides, the colonel himself is a living refutation of any such idiotic action. But if it's not her father she

is trying to shield, who is it? And why should anybody be so insanely vindictive as to imagine that the killing of a few chiefs of construction will cut any figure with the company which hires them?"

These nagging questions were still unanswered when the graying dawn found him dozing in his chair, with the camp whistles sounding the early turnout, and Bromley begging feebly for a drink of water.

VIII.

Bromley had been a week in hospital at Castle 'Cadia, and was recovering as rapidly as a well-nurtured man should, when Ballard was surprised one morning by a descent of the entire house-party, generated by Miss Craigmiles, upon the scene of activities at the dam.

The invasion was not altogether welcome. The Kentuckian had a working man's impatience of interruptions, and since Bromley's accident he had been doing double duty. On this particular morning he was about to start on a flying round of the camps down the river, but he countermanded the order for the locomotive when he saw Elsa and her guests picking their way among the obstructions in the stone-yard.

"Please—oh, please don't look so inhospitable!" she begged reproachfully, when he went to meet the irruption of sightseers. "We have driven and fished and climbed mountains and played children's games at home until there was positively nothing else to do. Pacify him some way, Cousin Janet—he's going to warn us off!"

Ballard hastened to disclaim any such inhospitable intention, and proceeded to prove his words by his deeds. Young Blacklock and Bigelow were both easily interested in the building details; the women were given an opportunity to see the inside workings of the men's housekeeping in the shacks, the mess-tent, and the camp kitchen; and the major was permitted and encouraged to be loftily critical of everything.

Once fairly committed as entertainer, the Kentuckian did all that could be expected, and more. When the visitors had surfeited themselves on concrete-mixing and stone-laying and camp housekeeping, the chief engineer had plank seats placed in a flat-car, and the invaders were whisked away on an impromptu railway excursion to some of the nearer ditch camps.

Before leaving the headquarters, Ballard gave Kirkpatrick an Irish hint; and when the excursionists returned from the railway jaunt, there was a miraculous luncheon served in the big mess-tent. Garou, the French-Canadian camp cook, had a soul above the bare necessities when the occasion demanded; and he had Ballard's private stores to draw upon.

After the luncheon, Ballard let his guests scatter as they pleased, charging himself particularly with the oversight and wardenship of Mr. Lester Wingfield. There was only one chance in a hundred that the playwright, left to his own devices, would stumble upon the skeleton in the camp closet. But the Kentuckian was alert to make that one chance ineffective.

Several things came of the hour spent as Wingfield's keeper while the others were visiting the wing dam and the quarry, the spillway, and the cut-off tunnel. One of them was a juster appreciation of the playwright as a man and a brother.

Ballard smiled mentally when he realized that his point of view had been that of the primitive man, jealous of a rival. Wingfield was not half a bad sort, he admitted; a little inclined to pose, since it was his art to epitomize a world of *poseurs*; an enthusiast in his calling; but at bottom a workable companion and the shrewdest of observers.

For this cause the Kentuckian did penance for the preconceived opinion, and exerted himself to make Wingfield's insulation painless. The sun shone hot on the stone-yard, and there was a jar of passable tobacco in the office bungalow. Would Wingfield care to go indoors and lounge until the oth-

ers came to a proper sense of the desirability of shade and quietude on a hot afternoon?

Wingfield would, gladly. He confessed shamelessly to a habit of smoking his after-luncheon pipe on his back. There was a rough-built divan in the office quarters, with cushions and blanket coverings, and Ballard found the tobacco-jar and a clean pipe, a long-stemmed "church-warden," dear to the heart of a lazy man.

"Now, this is what I call solid comfort," said the playwright, stretching himself luxuriously on the divan. "A man's den that is a den, and not a bric-à-brac shop masquerading under the name; a good pipe; good tobacco; good company. Don't you know, Mr. Ballard, I've felt it in my bones that I was missing something by not getting in with you fellows down here? But every time I have tried to break away, something else has turned up."

Ballard was ready with his bucket of cold water.

"You haven't missed much. There isn't a great deal in a construction-camp to invite the literary mind, I should say." And he tried to make the saying sound not too inhospitable.

"Oh, you're off wrong there," argued the playwright, with cheerful arrogance. "You probably haven't a sense of the literary values—a good many people haven't—born blind on that side, you know. Now, Miss Van Bryck has the seeing eye, all right. She says you have a dramatic situation down here every little while. She told me that story of yours about the stone smashing into your office in the middle of the night. That's good stuff—lots of possibilities in a thing like that. By the way, this is the room, isn't it? Does that patch in the ceiling cover the hole?"

Ballard admitted the patch, and strove manfully to throw the switch ahead of Wingfield to the end that the talk might be shunted to some less dangerous topic.

"Hang the tobacco!" said the guest irritably, in answer to Ballard's query as to the quality of his pet smoking

mixture. "You and Miss Craigmiles seem to be bitten with the same mania for subject-changing. I'd like to hear that rock-throwing story at first hands, if you don't mind."

Ballard told it, carefully divesting it of all the little mystery thrills which he had included for Miss Dosia's benefit.

"Um!" commented Wingfield, at the close of the bald narration of fact. "It would seem to have lost a good bit in the way of human interest since Miss Van Bryck repeated it to me. Did you embroider it for her, or did she embroider it for me?"

Ballard laughed. "I'm sorry to have spoiled it for you. But, anyway, you couldn't make a dramatic situation out of a careless quarryman's overloading of his charge."

"Oh, no," said the playwright. And he smoked his pipe out in silence.

Ballard thought the incident comfortably dead and buried, but he did not know his man. Long after Wingfield might have been supposed to have forgotten all about the stone catapulting, he sat up suddenly and said:

"Say! you explained to Miss Dosia that the stone couldn't possibly have come from the quarry without knocking the science of artillery into a cocked hat."

"Oh, hold on!" protested Ballard. "You mustn't hold me responsible for a bit of dinner-table talk with a young woman. Perhaps Miss Dosia wished to be mystified. I put it to you as man to man: would you have disappointed her?"

The playwright's laugh showed his fine teeth.

"They tell me you are at the top of the heap in your profession, Mr. Ballard, and I can believe it. But I'm no slouch in my specialty—which is prying into the inner consciousness of things. There is a mystery about that stone episode, and for some reason you are trying to hide it. Conversely, I'd like to get at the bottom of it—for purely dramatic purposes. Is there any good reason why I shouldn't?"

Ballard's salvation for this time per-

sonified itself in the figure of Contractor Kirkpatrick coming to the office door to ask a "question of information," as he phrased it. Hence, there was an excuse for a break and a return to the sun-kissed stone-yard.

Ballard purposely prolonged the talk with Kirkpatrick until the scattered sightseers had gathered for a descent, under Jerry Blacklock's lead, to the ravine below the dam where the river thundered out of the cut-off tunnel. But when he saw that Miss Craigmiles had elected to stay behind, and that Wingfield had attached himself to the elder Miss Cantrell, he gave the contractor his information boiled down into a curt sentence or two, and hastened to join the stay-behind.

"You'll melt out here in the sun," he said, coming to stand beside her as she stood looking down into the whirling vortex made by the torrent's plunge into the tunnel mouth.

She ignored the care-taking phrase as if she had not heard it. "Mr. Wingfield—have you kept him from finding out?" she demanded.

"For the present moment, yes. But you'll permit me to suggest that it was taking a rather long chance—your bringing him down here."

"I know; I couldn't help it. Dosia would have brought him on your invitation. I did everything I could think of to obstruct; and when they had beaten me, I made a party affair of it. You'll have to forgive me for spoiling your working day."

"Since it has given me a chance to be with you, I'm happy in losing the day," he said; and he meant it. But he let her know the worst in the other matter in an added sentence. "I'm afraid the mischief is done in Wingfield's affair, in spite of everything."

"How?" she asked; and the anxiety in the gray eyes cut him to the heart.

He told her briefly of the chance arousing of Wingfield's curiosity, and of the playwright's expressed determination to fathom the mystery of the table-smashing stone. Her dismay was pathetic.

"You should never have taken him

into your office," she objected. "He was sure to be reminded."

"I didn't foresee that; and he was beginning to gossip with the workmen."

"You *must* find a way to stop him," she insisted. "If you only knew what terrible consequences are wrapped up in it!"

He waited until a stone block, dangling in the clutch of the derrick-fall over its appointed resting-place on the growing wall of masonry, had been lowered into the cement bed prepared for it before he said soberly: "That is the trouble—I *don't* know. And, short of quarreling outright with Wingfield, I don't see any effective way of muzzling him."

"No; you mustn't do that. There is misery enough and enmity enough without making any more. I'll try to keep him away."

"You will fail," he said, with conviction. "Mr. Wingfield happens to be a dramatist; but I can assure you from this one day's observation of him that he would much rather unravel a plot than build one."

She was silent while the men were swinging another great stone out over the cañon chasm. The shadow of the huge derrick-boom swept around and across them as they stood on the cliff's edge, and she shuddered, as if the intangible thing were some icy finger to touch her.

"You must help me," she pleaded. "I cannot see the way a single step ahead."

"And I am still deeper in the darkness," he reminded her gently. "You forget that I don't know what threatens you, or how it threatens."

"I can't tell you; I can't tell any one," she said; and he made sure there was a sob at the catching of her breath.

As once before, he grew suddenly masterful.

"You are wronging yourself and me, Elsa, dear. You forget that your trouble is mine; that in the end we two shall be one, in spite of all the obstacles."

She shook her head. "I told you

you must not forget yourself again—and you are forgetting. There is one obstacle which can never be overcome."

"I remember only that I love you. And you are afraid to tell me what this terrible obstacle is," he dared.

She did not answer.

"You won't tell me that you are in love with Wingfield?" he persisted.

Still no reply.

"Elsa, girl, can you look me in the eyes and tell me that you do not love me?"

She neither looked nor denied.

"Then that is all I need to know at present," he went on doggedly. "I refuse to recognize any other obstacle."

She broke silence so swiftly that the words seemed to leap to her lips.

"There is one, dear friend," she said, with a little upflash of strong emotion; "one that can never be overcome." She pointed to the boulder-torn flood churning itself into spray in the cañon pot below. "Let me measure it for you—and for myself. Rather than be your wife—the mother of your children—I would gladly, joyfully fling myself into that."

The motion he made to catch her, to draw her back from the brink of the chasm, was purely mechanical, but it served to break the strain of a situation that had suddenly become impossible.

"To the rescue!" she cried, with a swift retreat behind the barricades of mockery. And then, with a smile which was only half-hearted: "In another minute we should have fallen headlong into melodrama, with Mr. Wingfield hopelessly out of reach for the note-taking process."

"Then you didn't mean what you said?" he ventured, trying hard to overtake the fleeing realities.

"I did, indeed. Don't make me say it again. The lights are up, and the audience might be looking. See how determined Mr. Bigelow is not to let Cousin Janet discover how she is crushing him!"

Out of the lower ravine the other members of the party were straggling, with Bigelow giving first aid to a breathless Mrs. Van Bryck, and young

Blacklock helping first one and then another of the four younger women.

The workmen in the cutting-yard were preparing to swing a third massive stone into place on the dam, and Miss Craigmiles, quite herself again, asked to be shown how the hooks were made fast in the process of "toggling."

Ballard accepted his defeat in the field of sentiment, and while he was explaining the mechanical matter, the others came up, and the buckboards sent down from Castle 'Cadia to take the party home were seen wheeling into line at the upper end of the foot-hill cañon.

"There is our recall, Mr. Ballard," said the breathless chaperon, "and I dare say you are immensely relieved. We have had a perfectly lovely time."

"Such a delightful time!" murmured the sharers of the common Christian name in unison; and Miss Craigmiles added demurely: "Don't you see we are waiting for you to ask us to come again, Mr. Ballard?"

"Oh, certainly; any time," said Ballard, taking his cue. Notwithstanding, on the short walk up to the buckboards he was wondering again.

Elsa's moods were perfect, or perfect imitations; he could never tell which. And the light-hearted young woman who walked beside him up the steep path was the very antithesis of the anxious one who had twice let him see the vast sea of trouble on which she was tossing.

The wonder was still present when he put himself in the way to help her to a seat in one of the waiting vehicles. They were a little in advance of the others, and when she turned to say good-by, he saw her eyes. Beyond the laugh in them the trouble shadows were still lurking; and heartening words were on his lips when the gray eyes looking past him suddenly dilated with horror.

"Look!" she gasped, pointing back to the dam; and when he wheeled he saw they were all looking. The third great stone had been swung out over the dam, and little by little, in jerks that made the wire cables snap and

sing, the clutching hooks were losing their hold in mid-air. The yells of the men imperiled rose from the cañon, and the man at the winding-drums seemed to have lost his head.

Young Blacklock, who was taking an engineering course at college, turned and ran back down the path, shouting like a madman. Ballard made a megaphone of his hands and bellowed at the hoister engineer. "Lower away! Drop it!" he shouted; but the command came too late. With a final jerk the hooks gave way, and the huge block shot down a sheer fifty feet, striking the dam with a crash like an explosion of dynamite.

Dosia Van Bryck's shriek was ringing in Ballard's ears, and the look of frozen horror on Elsa's face was before his eyes, when he dashed down the path after Blacklock. Happily, there were no lives lost—no one seriously hurt. On the dam-head Kirkpatrick was waving his arms and crying the news to the yard men clustering thick on the edge of the cliff above.

Ballard ran back to the waiting buckboards.

"Thank God, it's only a money loss this time!" he announced. "The men saw it when it began to slip, and got out of the way."

"There was no one hurt? Are you sure there was no one hurt?" panted Mrs. Van Bryck, fanning herself vigorously.

"No one at all. I'm sorry we had to give you such a shock for your leave-taking, but accidents will happen now and then. You will excuse me if I go at once? There is work to be done."

"H'm—ha! One moment, Mr. Ballard," rasped the major. But Mrs. Van Bryck outran him.

"Oh, certainly; don't lose a moment. You shouldn't have troubled to come back. So sorry—it was very dreadful."

While the chaperon was groping for her self-composure, Wingfield said something to Dosia, who was his seat-mate, and sprang to the ground.

"Hold on a minute, Ballard!" he

called. "I'm going with you. What you need right now is a trained investigator, and I'm your man. Great Scott! to think that a thing like that should happen and I should see it!" And then to Miss Craigmiles, who appeared to be earnestly trying to dissuade him: "No, I sha'n't get underfoot, and you needn't trouble to send down for me. I can walk home later on."

IX.

In the days following the episode of the tumbling granite block, Wingfield came and went unhindered between Castle 'Cadia and the construction-camp, sometimes with Jerry Blacklock for a companion, but oftener alone. Short of the primitive expedient of picking a quarrel with him, Ballard could think of no pretext for excluding him; and as for keeping him in ignorance of the "hoodoo," it was to be assumed that he had long since heard the stories of the men.

How deeply the playwright was interested, no one knew precisely; not even young Blacklock, who was systematically sounded, first by Miss Craigmiles, and afterward at regular intervals by Ballard.

As Blacklock saw it, Wingfield was merely killing time at the camp. When he was not telling stories to the men off duty, he lounged in the engineers' bungalow, smoking Ballard's tobacco and reading with apparent avidity one or another of Bromley's text-books on the anatomy of birds and the taxidermic art.

"Whatever it is that you are afraid of isn't happening," Ballard told Elsa one day when he came down from Bromley's hospital room at the country house and found her waiting for him under the portières of the darkened library. "Wingfield is perfectly innocuous. He is the laziest man I ever knew. He may be absorbing 'local color,' but he certainly isn't making an effort to acquire even that."

"You are mistaken," was all she would say; and a day came when the event proved it.

It was the occasion of Bromley's first return to the camp, a full month after his fall into the cañon. Young Blacklock had driven him by the roundabout road in the motor-car, and the industries paused while the workmen gave him an ovation. Afterward he was glad enough to lie down on the make-shift lounge in the bungalow; but when Blacklock would have driven him back in time for luncheon at Castle 'Cadia, as his strict orders were, the convalescent begged to be allowed to put his feet under the mess-table with his chauffeur and his chief.

To the three, doing justice to the best that Garou could find in the commissary stores, came Wingfield, to drag up a stool and to make himself at home at Ballard's table, as his custom had come to be. Until the meal was ended and the pipes were filled, he held his peace. But when Ballard made a move to go down to the railroad-yard with Kirkpatrick, the spell was broken.

"Hold up a minute! Don't rush off so frantically!" he cut in. "I've been waiting for a straight week to get you and Bromley together for a little confab about matters and things, and the time has come. Sit down!"

Ballard resumed his seat with an air of predetermined patience, and Wingfield nodded approval. "That's right," he went on. "Brace yourself! I may possibly bore you both; but I've reached a point where a powwow is the next thing in order. I have either unearthed the most devilish plot that ever existed, or else I've stumbled into a mare's nest of fairly heroic proportions."

By this time he was reasonably sure of his audience. Bromley, still rather pallid and weak, squared himself with an elbow on the table. Blacklock got up to stand behind Bromley's chair. Ballard thrust his hands into his pockets and frowned. The moment had probably arrived when he would be required to fight fire with fire for Elsa's sake, and he was nerving himself for the battle. "I know beforehand about what you are going to say," he said; "but let's have it."

"You shall have it, hot and hot," promised the playwright. "For quite a little time, and from a purely artistic point of view, I have been interesting myself in the curious psychological condition which breeds so many accidents on this job of yours. I started out with the assumption that there was a reason. The human mind isn't a god, to make something out of nothing. You say, Mr. Ballard, that the men are superstitious fools, and that their mental attitude is chiefly responsible for all the trouble. I say that the fact—the cause—fact—existed before the superstition. Don't you believe it?"

Ballard neither affirmed nor denied; but Bromley nodded. "I've always believed it," he admitted.

"There isn't the slightest doubt of its existence," resumed the theorist oracularly. "I don't know how far back it can be traced, but Engineer Braithwaite's drowning will do for a starting-point. You'll say there was nothing mysterious about that; yet the other day Hoskins, the locomotive driver, said to me: 'They can say what they like, but I ain't believing that the river stove him all up like he'd been stomped on in a cattle corral.' There you have the first push over into the field of the unaccountable."

"You are getting the cart before the horse," cut in Ballard, beginning the fire-fighting. "It's ten to one Hoskins never thought of being incredulous until after the later happenings had given him the superstitious twist."

"The sequence is immaterial—quite immaterial," argued the playwright. "The fact stays with us that there *was* something partly unaccountable in this first tragedy to which the thought of Hoskins—the thoughts of all those who knew the circumstances—could revert."

"Well?" said Ballard.

"It is on this hypothesis that I have constructed my theory. Casting out all the accidents chargeable to carelessness, disobedience of orders, or temporary aberration on the part of the workmen, there still remains a goodly number of them carrying this disturb-

ing atom of mystery. Oh, I've gone into this thing from top to bottom; it's right in my line, you know. The mysterious things were unaccounted for at the time; they are still unaccounted for. Take Sanderson's case. He came here, I'm told, with a decent record; he was not in any sense a moral degenerate. Yet in a very short time he was killed in a quarrel over a woman at whom the average man wouldn't look twice. Blacklock, here, has seen the woman; but I'd like to ask if either of you two have?" This to Ballard and the assistant.

The Kentuckian shook his head, and Bromley confessed that he had not.

"Well, Jerry and I have," said Wingfield, scoring his point with the Mephistophelian smile. "She is a gray-haired Mexican crone, apparently old enough, and certainly hideous enough, to be the Mexican foreman's mother. I'll venture the assertion that Sanderson never thought of her as a feminine possibility at all."

"Hold on; I shall have to spoil your theory there," interrupted Bromley. "Billy certainly put himself in Manuel's hands. He used to go down to the ranch two or three times a week, and he spent money on the woman. I know it because he borrowed of me. And along toward the last, he never went without slinging his rifle under the stirrup-leather."

"Looking for trouble with Manuel, you would say?" queried Wingfield.

"No doubt of it. And when the thing finally came to a focus, the Mexican gave Billy a fair show; made him take his gun, which the woman was trying to hide, get on his horse, and ride to the far corner of the corral—where he was to wheel and begin shooting, or be shot in the back. The program was carried out to the letter, Manuel walking his bronco to the other corner of the cattle yard. Three or four shots were fired by each before Sanderson was hit."

"Um!" said the amateur detective. "There were witnesses—some of the Craigmiles cowboys. You're taking their word for all this?"

Bromley made a sorrowful face. "No; it's Billy's own story. The poor fellow lived long enough to tell me. He tried to tell me something else—something about Manuel and the woman—but there wasn't time enough."

Wingfield had found the long-stemmed pipe and was filling it from Ballard's jar.

"Was that all?" he inquired.

"All but the finish—which was rather heart-breaking. When he could no longer speak, he kept pointing to me and to his rifle. I understood he was trying to tell me that I should keep the gun."

"You did keep it?" said Wingfield.

"Yes; I have it yet."

"Let me have a look at it, will you?"

The weapon was found, and Wingfield examined it critically. "Is it loaded?" he asked.

Bromley nodded. "I guess it is. It hasn't been out of that cupboard since the day of the killing."

The playwright worked the lever cautiously and an empty cartridge-shell flipped out and fell to the floor. "William Sanderson's last shot," he remarked reflectively, and went on pumping until eleven loaded cartridges lay in an orderly row on the table. "You were wrong in your count of the number of shots fired, or else the magazine was not full when Sanderson began," he commented. And then, when Blacklock was about to pick up one of the cartridges: "Hold on, Jerry; don't disturb them, if you please."

Blacklock laughed boyishly. "Mr. Wingfield's got a notion," he said. "He's always getting 'em."

"I have," asserted the investigator, and he opened the blade of his penknife and dug the point of it into the bullet of the cartridge first extracted. "There is your Mexican fair play," he added, when the bullet, a harmless pellet of white clay neatly coated with lead foil, fell apart under the knife-blade. "Now, let us see how many more there are to go with this."

There were four cartridges with the dummy bullets; the remaining seven being genuine. Wingfield did the sum

in arithmetic aloud. "Four and five are nine, and nine and seven are sixteen. Sanderson started out that day with a full magazine, we'll say. He fired five of the dummies—with perfect safety for Manuel—and here are the other four. If the woman had had a little more time, she would have pumped out all of the good cartridges. Being somewhat hurried, she exchanged only nine, which, in an even game, gave Manuel ten chances to Sanderson's one. It was a cinch."

Ballard turned away, handling the empty gun. Bromley's pallid face turned gray, and his exclamation was neither an oath nor a prayer. The tragedy had touched him very nearly.

"Poor Billy!" he said. "It was a cold-blooded murder."

"I have been more than half-suspecting it, all along," asserted Wingfield. "But the motive seemed to be lacking."

"The motive?" said Bromley. "Why, that remains the same, doesn't it?—more's the pity."

The playwright had lighted the long-stemmed pipe, and was thoughtfully blowing smoke-rings toward the patch in the ceiling.

"Not if my theory holds good, Mr. Bromley. You see, I am proceeding upon the supposition that Sanderson wasn't messing in Manuel's domestic affairs. Tell me: was he interested in the details of Braithwaite's drowning? That story must have been pretty fresh in everybody's mind at that time."

"It was; and Sanderson was interested. Now that you recall it, I remember his saying something that might have given the story its superstitious twist for Hoskins and the other men."

Wingfield smote the table with his fist.

"There is your connecting-link!" he exclaimed. "We have just proved that Sanderson was not killed in a fair fight; he was murdered. By the same token, Braithwaite was murdered, too. Recall the circumstances as they have been related: when they found him his head was crushed and both arms were

broken—see here!” he threw himself into the attitude of one fishing from the river-bank. “Somebody comes up behind me with a club raised to brain me. I get a glimpse of him, dodge, and put up my arms, so—and one blow does the business. That’s all, or all but one little item: Manuel’s woman knows who struck the blow, and Sanderson was trying to induce her to tell.”

If the announcement had been an explosion to shake the bungalow to its adobe foundations, the effect could scarcely have been more striking. Ballard flung the gun aside and sprang to his feet. The collegian sat down weakly and stared. Bromley’s jaw dropped, and he glared across at Wingfield, as if the clever deduction were a mortal insult to be promptly resented. The playwright laughed.

“Seems to knock you fellows all in a heap,” he said calmly. “What have you been doing all these months that you haven’t dug it out for yourselves?”

Bromley was moistening his lips.

“Go on, if you please, Mr. Wingfield. Tell us all you know.”

“There is more; plenty of it,” was the cool reply. “Three months ago you had a train wreck on the railroad—two men killed. ‘Rough track,’ some one said. Not at all. The spikes were pulled out and a rail was loosened. A little later one man was killed and two crippled by a premature blast in the quarry. Carelessness, this time; and *you* said it, Mr. Bromley. It was nothing of the kind. Some one had substituted a coil of quick-firing fuse for the ordinary slow-match the men had been using. One of the survivors was curious enough to steal the coil of fuse, having some vague notion of suing somebody for damages. I begged a bit of it. Look at this.” He took a piece of fuse a foot long from his pocket, uncoiled it upon the table, and applied a match. It went off like a train of dry gunpowder.

“Is that all?” asked Bromley, wetting his lips again.

“By no manner of means. I could go on indefinitely. The falling derrick

may not have been aimed specially at Macpherson, but it committed premeditated murder, just the same; the broken cable was rotted in two with acid. How do I know? By making a few simple tests on the broken ends with chemicals filched out of Colonel Craigmiles’ laboratory up yonder at his electric plant. No, I’m no chemist; but you’ll find, when you come to write stories and plays, you have to know a little of everything. Then there were those hooks that let go and dropped the rock on the dam the day we were all down here—more acid. The one thing that stumps me is your table-smashing stone; but you can guess at that. It didn’t come from the quarry—couldn’t come from the quarry without making a new set of natural laws for itself. But it could have been heaved from the top of the hill—as it probably was.”

Bromley was gripping the table’s edge and exchanging glances with Ballard. It was the Kentuckian who broke the little silence which fell upon the three of them when Wingfield made an end.

“Summing it all up, what is your conclusion, Wingfield? You have reached one, I take it?”

The playwright made the sign of assent.

“As I told you, I went into this thing out of sheer curiosity, and partly because there were obstructions put in my way. Afterward it held me by its own grip. I’m not sure that there have been any accidents at all. Everything that has happened, as far as I’ve gone, has been made to happen; and the motive is perfectly apparent. The work on this irrigation project of yours is to be hampered and delayed by all possible means, even to the taking of human life.”

Again there was silence in the thick-walled office room—a silence so profound that the clickings of the stone hammers in the yard and the rasping exhausts of the hoisting-engines at the dam seemed far removed. It was Bromley who spoke first, and his question was pointedly suggestive.

"You haven't stopped with the generalization, Mr. Wingfield?"

"Meaning that I have found the man who is responsible for all these desperate things? I'm afraid I have. There seems to be only one man in the world whose interests are at stake. Naturally, I haven't gone very deeply into that part of it. But didn't some one tell me that there is a fight on in the courts in which delay is the one thing needful?"

Ballard came back to the table and stood within arm's-reach of the speaker. His square jaw had taken on the aggressive angle and his eyes were cold and hard.

"What will you do, Mr. Wingfield? Have you arrived at that conclusion, also?"

Wingfield's doubtful glance was in young Blacklock's direction, and his reply was evasive. "Doesn't it strike you that this is hardly the time or place to go into that, Mr. Ballard?"

"No."

"Well. . . . Jerry, what we are talking about now is among gentlemen. Do you understand?"

"Sure thing," said the collegian.

"You ask me what I am going to do, Mr. Ballard, and I'll ask you to put yourself in my place. Clearly, it is a law-abiding citizen's plain duty to go and lay the facts before the nearest prosecuting attorney and let the law take its course. On the other hand, I'm a man like other men, and——"

Ballard straightened the path of hesitation for him.

"And you are Colonel Craigmiles' guest. Go on."

"Well, at first I found it blankly incredible, as any one mixing and mingling with the colonel in the daily amenities would. Later I had to admit the ugly fact, and then the personal factor entered the equation. There are good reasons why I should neither make nor meddle in this affair; why I should be the last man on earth to raise the hue and cry. So I have about decided upon a compromise. This thing will come out—it's bound to come out; and I don't want to be here when it

does. I think I shall have a pretty urgent call to go back to New York."

Bromley laid hold of the table and pulled himself to his feet; but it was Ballard who said slowly, as one who measures his words and the sting of them: "Mr. Wingfield, you are more different kinds of an ass than I took you to be, and that is saying a great deal. Out of a mass of hearsay, the idle stories of a lot of workmen who have been shrewd enough to make a laughing-stock of you, you have built up this fairy-tale. I suppose you couldn't help it; it's a part of your equipment as a professional maker of fairy-tales. But there are two things for which I will answer personally: you will not leave Castle 'Cadia until your time is out; and you'll not leave this room until you have promised the three of us that this cock-and-bull story of yours stops right here with its first telling."

"That's so," said Bromley, with a quiet menace in his tone.

It was the playwright's turn to gasp, and he did it.

"You—you don't believe it, after all? Say, I believe you are both stark, staring mad!" he stammered. And then, with more composure: "Are you in it, too, Jerry?"

"I guess I am," said Blacklock, meaning no more than that he felt obliged to stand with the men of his chosen profession.

Wingfield drew a long breath, and was himself again. "Of course it's just as you please," he said carelessly. "I had a notion I was doing you two a service, but if you choose to take the other view of it—well, there's no accounting for tastes. I'll find my wages later on. It's bully material."

"That is another thing," Ballard went on still more coldly. "If you ever put pen to paper with these fool theories of yours for a basis, I'll hunt you down as I would a wild beast."

"So will I," echoed Bromley.

Wingfield rose and put the long-stemmed pipe carefully aside.

"You are a pair of bally idiots," he remarked, quite without heat. Then he

looked at his watch and spoke pointedly to Blacklock. "You're forgetting Miss Elsa's fishing-party to the upper cañon, aren't you? Suppose we drive around to Castle 'Cadia in the car? You can send Otto back after Mr. Bromley." And young Blacklock was so dazed by the cool impudence of the suggestion that he consented, and went with the playwright.

For a long time after the stuttering purr of the motor-car had died away, the two men sat in silence in the bungalow office. Bromley was absently toying with the cartridges from Sander-son's rifle, mute proofs of the truth of Wingfield's deductions, and Ballard seemed to have forgotten that he had promised Kirkpatrick to run a line for an additional side-track in the railroad yard. In the fulness of time he said: "Do you blame me, Loudon?"

Bromley shook his head.

"No; there was nothing else to do. But I couldn't help being sorry for him."

"So was I," was the prompt rejoinder. "Wingfield is a good sort; and the way he has ferreted the thing out is masterly. But I had to tie his tongue; you know I had to, Loudon."

"Of course you had to."

"There is no doubt in your mind that he has hit upon the true solution of things?"

"None at all. I have suspected it, in part at least, for a good while. And I had proof positive before Wingfield gave it to us."

"How?" queried Ballard.

Bromley was still toying with the cartridges. "I hate to tell you, Breckenridge. And yet, you ought to know," he added. "It concerns you, very vitally."

Ballard's smile was grim. "I'm well past the shocking-point. We may as well make clean work of it while we're at it."

"Well, then; I didn't stumble over the cañon cliff; I was knocked over."

"What!"

"It's true."

"And you know who did it?"

"I can make a pretty good guess.

While I was down at the wing dam a man passed me, coming this way. He was a big man, and he was muffled to the ears in a raincoat. I know because I heard the peculiar 'mackintosh' rustle as he went by. I knew then who it was. It is one of the colonel's eccentricities never to go out after night-fall—in a bone-dry country, mind you—without wearing a raincoat."

"Well?" said Ballard.

"He didn't see me, though I thought at first that he did; he kept looking back, as if he were expecting some one to follow him. He took the path on the right-hand side of the cañon—the one I took a few minutes later. That's all, except that I heard the 'slither' of a mackintosh just as the blow fell that knocked me out."

"Heavens, man! it's incredible! Why, he saved your life, after the fact! You would have died that night if he had not let Jerry drive him down here in the car."

"It is incredible, as you say; and yet, it isn't, when you surround all the facts. What is the reason, the only reason, why Colonel Craigmiles should resort to all these desperate expedients?"

"Delay, I suppose; time to get his legal fight shaped up in the courts."

"Exactly. If he can hold us back long enough, the dam will never be completed. He knows it, and Mr. Pelham knows it, too. Unhappily for us, the colonel has found a way to insure delay. The work can't go on without a boss."

"But, good Lord, Loudon! the man loves you. Why should he try to kill you one minute and move heaven and earth to save your life the next?"

Bromley shook his head sorrowfully.

"That is what made me say what I did about not wanting to tell you, Breckenridge. That crack over the head wasn't meant for me; it was meant for you. If it hadn't been so dark that night—but it was; pocket-dark. And he knew you'd be coming along that path on your way back to camp—knew you'd be coming, and wasn't expecting any one else."

Ballard jumped up and began to pace the floor. "My God!" he said, "I was his guest; I had just broken bread at his table! When he went out to lie in wait for me, he left me talking with his daughter!"

Bromley had up-ended the eleven cartridges, false and true, in a curving row on the table. The crooking line took the form of a huge interrogation-point.

"Wingfield thought he had solved all the mysteries, but the greatest of them remains," he said thoughtfully. "How can the man we know be such a fiend incarnate?" Then he broke ground again in the old field. "Will you do now what I begged you to do at first—throw up this job and go away from here?"

Ballard stopped short and his word was an explosive "No!"

"That is half righteous anger, and half something else. What is the other half, Breckenridge?" And when Ballard was silent—"I can guess it; it is the same thing that made you cram Wingfield's theories down his throat a little while ago. You are sorry for the daughter."

Through the open door Ballard saw Kirkpatrick coming for him.

"You have guessed it, Loudon. In the face of all this—in spite of it all—I shall one day marry Elsa Craigmiles, God willing. Now you know why Wingfield mustn't be allowed to talk; why I mustn't go away and give place to a new chief who might live to see the colonel hanged. She must be spared at any cost. One other word before Kirkpatrick butts in: When my time comes, if it does come, you and one other man will know how I passed out. I want your promise that you'll keep still, and keep Wingfield still. Blacklock doesn't count."

"Sure," said Bromley quietly. And then, with the contractor fairly at the door: "You'll do the same for me, Breckenridge. Because—oh, confound it all!—I'm in the same boat; without a ghost of a show, you understand."

Ballard put his back squarely to Michael Kirkpatrick scraping his feet

on the puncheon-floored porch of the bungalow, and gripped Bromley's hand.

"It's a bargain," he said. "We'll take the long chance and stand by her together, old man. And if she chooses the better part in the end, I'll try not to act like a jealous fool. Now, you turn in and lie down awhile. I've got to go with Michael."

This time it was Bromley who saved the situation. "What a pair of luminous donkeys we are!" he laughed. "She calls you 'dear friend,' and me 'little brother.' If we're right good and tractable, we may get cards to her wedding—with Wingfield."

X.

It was Miss Craigmiles herself who gave Ballard the exact date of Gardiner's coming, driving down to the camp in the motor-car. A cloudburst in the main range had made the stage road from Alta Vista impassable, leaving the railway—by some unexplained miracle of good fortune—unharmful. Hence, unless Gardiner could be brought over on the material-train, he would be indefinitely held on the other side of the mountain. Miss Elsa came ostensibly to beg a favor.

"Of course I'll send over for him," said Ballard. "Didn't I tell you he was going to be my guest?"

"But he isn't," she insisted playfully. There had been no untoward happenings for three peaceful weeks, and there was occasion for light-heartedness.

Ballard stepped down from the bungalow porch and arbitrarily throttled the motor-car engines to a standstill.

"This is the first time I've seen you for a month," he protested, which was not true. "Please come up and sit on the porch. There is a quantity of things I want to say."

"Where is Mr. Bromley?" she asked, making no move to leave the driving-seat.

"He is out on the ditch work, luckily for me. Won't you 'light and come in?—as we say back in the good old blue-grass country."

"You don't deserve it. You haven't been near us since Mr. Bromley went back to work. Why?"

"I have been very busy." The commonplace excuse was the only one that suggested itself. He could not tell her that it was impossible for one to accept hospitality of a man who has deliberately planned to murder one.

"Mr. Bromley hasn't been too busy."

"Bromley owes you all a very great debt of gratitude."

"And you do not, you would say. That is quite true. You owe us nothing but hatred."

"No," he returned gravely. "I can't think of you and of enmity at the same moment."

"If you only knew," she said half-absently, and the trouble shadow came quickly in her eyes. "There is no real cause for enmity or hatred."

"I'm thinking of you," he reminded her, reverting to the impossibility of associating that thought with the other.

"Thank you." Then, with the unexpectedness which was all her own: "What did you do to Mr. Wingfield?"

"I don't remember all the things I did to him. I believe I made him welcome—when I had to. He hasn't been using his welcome much lately, though."

"No; not since the day when Jerry drove Mr. Bromley down in the car and took Mr. Wingfield home. I'd like to know what happened."

"Nothing of any consequence. Let's talk of something else. Is your anxiety—the trouble you won't share with me—any lighter?"

"No—yes; just for the moment, perhaps."

"Are you still determined not to let me efface it for you?"

"You couldn't; it can never be effaced."

His smile was the man's smile of superior wisdom. "Don't we always say that when the trouble is personal?"

She ignored the query, and her rejoinder was totally irrelevant.

"You think I came down here to ask you to send for Mr. Gardiner. That was only an excuse. I wanted to ask you not to be vindictive."

Again he dissimulated. "I'm not vindictive; why should I be?"

"You have every reason; or, at least, you believe you have." She leaned toward him. "Please tell me, how much did Mr. Wingfield find out?"

It was blankly impossible to tell her the truth, or anything remotely resembling it. But his parrying of the question was passing skillless.

"Not being a mind-reader, I can't say. Our falling-out turned upon his threat to make literary material out of—well, out of matters that were in some measure my own private affairs."

"Oh! So there was a quarrel?"

"Not a very serious one. I believe I called him an ass, and he called me an idiot. There was no bloodshed."

"You are jesting again. You always jest when I want to be serious."

"I might retort that I learned the trick of it of you—in the days that are now a part of another existence."

"Oh!" she said; and there was so much more of distress than of impatience in the little outcry that he was mollified at once.

"I'm going to crank up the car and send you home," he averred. "I'm not fit to talk to you to-day." And he started the engines of the motor-car.

She laid her hand on the speed lever. "You'll come up and see me?" she asked; adding: "Some time when you are fit?"

"I'll come when I'm needed."

He walked beside the slowly moving car as she sent it down the mesa hill on the brake. At the hill-bottom turn, where the camp street ended and the roundabout road led off to the bridge, she stopped the car. The towering wall of the dam, with its dotting of workmen silhouetted black against the blue of the sky, rose high on the left, and she glanced up at it.

"You are nearly through?" she asked.

"Yes. Two weeks more, with no bad luck."

She was looking straight ahead again.

"You know what that means to us at Castle 'Cadia?"

"I know I'd rather be a 'mucker' with a pick and shovel out yonder in

the ditch than to be the boss here when the water is turned on."

"Will Mr. Pelham come out to the triumphal opening of the Arcadian reservation?"

"Oh, sure. There is to be a demonstration in force, as Major Blacklock would say; special trains from Denver to bring the crowd, a barbecue dinner, speeches, a land-viewing excursion over the completed portion of the railroad, and fireworks in the evening. You can trust Mr. Pelham to beat the big drum and to clash the cymbals vigorously at the psychological instant."

"For purely commercial reasons? I could go a step farther and tell you something else that will happen. There will be a good many transfers of the Arcadia Company's stock at the triumphal climax."

His eyes narrowed, and he regarded her thoughtfully, with one foot on the car step and his hands in the pockets of his short working-coat.

"What do you know about such things?" he demurred. "You know altogether too much for one small bachelor maid."

"I am the cow-punching princess of Arcadia, and Mr. Pelham's natural enemy, you must remember," she said, with a laugh that sounded quite care-free. "I could tell you more about the stock matter. Mr. Pelham has been very liberal with his friends. He has placed considerable quantities of the Arcadia Company's stock among them at merely nominal prices, asking only that they sign a 'gentlemen's agreement' not to resell any of it so that my father could get it. But there is a wheel within that wheel, too. Something more than half of the capital stock has been reserved as 'treasury stock.' When the enthusiasm reaches the proper height this reserved stock will be put upon the market. People will be eager to buy—won't they?—with the work all done and everything in readiness to tap the stream of wealth."

"That would be the natural inference."

"As the company's chief engineer,

you could probably get in on the 'ground floor,'—that Mr. Pelham is always talking about, couldn't you?"

Ballard looked hurt.

"See here, little girl! I am the company's hired man, and some day I'm going to marry you. I hope that defines my attitude. Mr. Pelham couldn't give me any of his stock on a silver platter!"

"And Mr. Bromley?"

"He isn't going to invest. He is in the same boat with me."

"How shocking!" she exclaimed, with a strained little laugh. "Is Mr. Bromley to marry your widow? Or are you to be the consolation prize? Doubtless you have arranged it between you."

Having said the incendiary thing, he brazened it out like a man.

"I suppose I might side-step, but I sha'n't. You know very well that Bromley is in love with you, and I'm afraid you have been too kind to him. That's a little hard on Loudon—when you are going to marry somebody else. But tell me a little more about this stock matter. Why should there be a 'gentlemen's agreement' to exclude your father? To an outsider like myself, Arcadia Company would seem to be about the last thing Colonel Adam Craigmiles would want to buy."

"Under present conditions, I think it is," she said. "I shouldn't buy it now."

"What would you do?"

"I'd wait patiently while the rocket is going up, and when the stick comes down I'd buy every bit of it I could find."

Again he was regarding her through half-closed eyelids. "As I said before, you know too much about such things. It's uncanny in a woman." He said it half in raillery, but his addenda was serious enough: "You think your father will win his lawsuit and so break the market?"

"No. On the contrary, I'm quite sure he will be beaten. I'm going, now. I've said too much to the company's engineer, as it is."

"You have said nothing to the com-

pany's engineer," he denied. "You have been talking to Breckenridge Ballard, your future——"

She set the car in motion before he could finish, and he stood looking after it as it shot up the first of the inclines among the rounded hills. It was quite out of sight before he began to realize that Elsa's visit had not been made for the purpose of asking him to send over the range for Gardiner, nor to beg him not to be vindictive. Her object had been to warn him not to buy Arcadia Irrigation. "Why?" came the question, shot-like; and like all the others of its tribe, it had to go unanswered.

The assistant professor of geology kept his appointment, was duly met by Ballard's special engine and a "dinkey" way-car, and was transported in state to the Arcadian fastnesses. Ballard had it in mind to run down the line on the other engine to meet the Bostonian; but Elsa forestalled him by intercepting the "special" at Ackerman's with the motor-car and whisking the guest over the roundabout road to Castle 'Cadia.

Gardiner walked down to the camp at the dam the following morning to make his peace with Ballard.

"Age has its privileges, Breckenridge, my son," was the form his apology took. "When I found that I might have my visit with you, and still be put up at the millionaire hostelry in the valley above, I didn't hesitate a moment. How are you coming on? Am I still in time to be in at the death?"

"I hope not," was the half-humorous rejoinder. "Because, if there is any death, it's likely to be mine, you know."

"Ah! You are tarred with the superstitious stick yourself, are you? What was it you said to me about two sheer accidents and a commonplace tragedy? You will remember that I warned you; also, that I was a true prophet. I predicted that Arcadia would have its shepherdess, you recollect."

But Ballard was not ready at the moment to dive into the pool of sentiment with the shrewd-eyed old schoolman for a bath-master, and he pro-

posed, instead, a walking tour of the industries.

Gardiner was duly impressed with the magnitude of the irrigation scheme; with the solidity and thoroughness of the work on the dam. But these matters became quickly subsidiary when he began to examine the curious formation of the foot-hill range or "hog-back."

"These little wrinklins of the earth's crust at the foot of the great ranges are nature's puzzle-pieces for us," he remarked. "I foresee a very enjoyable vacation for me—if you have forgiven me to the extent of a meal now and then, or possibly a shake-down in your bungalow, if I get caught out too late to reach the luxuries up yonder."

"If I haven't forgiven you, Bromley will take you in," laughed Ballard. "Make yourself one of us—when you please and as you please."

Gardiner accepted the invitation in its largest sense, and the afternoon of the same day found him clad in brown duck and leggings, prowling studiously in the outlet cañon with hammer and specimen-bag.

With the completion of the dam so near at hand, neither of the two engineers had much time to spare for extraneous things. But Gardiner asked little of his secondary hosts; and presently the thin, angular figure in brown canvas, and topped by a queer-shaped helmet that might have seen service in the Himalayas, prowling and tapping at the rocks, became a familiar sight.

The masons were setting the coping course on the great wall on the day when Gardiner's enthusiasm carried him beyond the dinner-hour at Castle 'Cadia, and made him an evening guest in the engineers' adobe; and in the after-supper talk it transpired that the assistant in geology had merely snatched a meager fortnight out of his work in the summer school, and would be leaving for home in another day or two.

Both of the young men protested. They had been too busy to see anything

of him in the comradely way, and they had been counting on the lull succeeding the opening celebration for more time to go about with him.

"You don't regret it half as much as I do," said the guest. "I have never been on more fascinatingly interesting ground. I could spend an entire summer on this hogback of yours without exhausting its astonishing resources."

Ballard's eyebrows went up inquiringly. He had slighted geology for the more practical studies in his college course.

"Meaning the broken formations?" he asked.

"Meaning the general topsyturvyism of all the different formations. Where you might reasonably expect to find one stratum, you find another perhaps thousands of years older—or younger—in the geological sense. And, by the way, that reminds me—neither of you youngsters are responsible for the foundations of that dam, are you?"

"No," said Bromley, answering for both. Then he asked why, adding that the specifications called for bed-rock, which Kirkpatrick, who had worked under Braithwaite, averred had been got.

"'Bed-rock,'" said the geologist. "That is a workman's word. What kind of rock was it?"

"I'd take it to be the close-grained limestone, from Kirkpatrick's description."

"Um," said Gardiner. "Dam-building is not exactly in my line, but I shouldn't care to trust anything short of the granites in such a locality as this."

"You've seen something?" queried Ballard.

"Nothing alarming—only an indication of what might be. Where the river emerges from your cut-off tunnel below the dam, it has worn out a deep pit in the old bed, as you know. The bottom of this pit must be far below the foundations of the masonry. Had you thought of that?"

Ballard nodded.

"That circumstance suggests three interrogation points. Query one: How

has the torrent managed to dig such a deep cavity if the true primitives underlie its bed? Query two: What causes the curious reverberatory sound, as if the water were plunging into a great cavern? Query three—and this is the most important: Why is the detritus washed up out of this pot-hole a singular brown shale, quite unlike anything found higher up the stream?"

Ballard and Bromley exchanged glances. "Your deductions, professor?" asked the younger man.

"I haven't made any, but I might hazard a purely speculative guess. Mr. Braithwaite's 'bed-rock' may not be the true primitive; it may be underbedded by this brown shale."

"Which brings on more talk," said Ballard reflectively.

"Yes. Granting the hypothesis, the Arcadia Company's dam may stand for a thousand years—or it may not. Its life might be determined in a single night, if by any means the water of the reservoir lake should find its way to an underlying softer stratum."

Ballard's eyes narrowed. "If that pot-hole, for example, were above the dam instead of below it?"

"Precisely," said the geologist. "In three minutes after the opening of such a channel your dam might be transformed into a bridge spanning an erosive torrent comparable, for fierce and destructive energy, to nothing in all nature."

Silence ensued, and afterward the talk drifted to other matters, chiefly reminiscent. It was while Bromley and Gardiner were carrying the brunt of it that Ballard got up and went out. A few minutes later the crack of a rifle rang upon the outdoor stillness, followed immediately by others in quick succession.

Bromley sprang up at the first discharge, but before he could reach the door, Ballard came in, carrying a hatful of brown earth. He was a little short of breath, and his eyes were flashing. But he was cool enough to stop Bromley's question before it could be set in words.

"It was only one of the colonel's

Mexican mine guards trying a little rifle practise in the dark," he said; and before there could be any comment: "By the way, Gardiner, here's a sample of some stuff I'd like to have you take home with you and analyze. I've got just enough of the prospector's blood in me to make me curious about it."

The geologist looked at the brown earth, passed a handful of it through his fingers; smelled it, tasted it.

"How much have you got of it?" he queried.

"Enough," rejoined the Kentuckian evasively.

"Then your fortune is made, my son. This 'stuff,' as you call it, is the basis of Colonel Craigmiles' wealth. I hope your vein of it isn't a part of his."

Again Ballard evaded. "What do you know about it, Gardiner? Have you ever seen any of it before?"

The geologist smiled. "I've 'proved up' on it, as your miners say of their claims. A few evenings ago we were talking of expert analyses—the colonel and young Wingfield and I—and the colonel made the rash statement that he could stump me; that he could give me a sample of a basic material carrying immense values the very name of which I would be unable to tell him after the most exhaustive tests. I took him up, and the three of us went down to his laboratory, which is in the room above the electric plant at the mouth of the upper cañon. The sample he gave me was some of this brown earth."

"And you analyzed it?" said Ballard.

"I did; and won a box of the colonel's cigars, for which, unhappily, I have no earthly use. It is zirconia; the earth-ore which carries the metal zirconium. Don't shame me and your alma mater by saying that this means nothing to you."

"You've got us down," laughed Bromley. "It's only a name to me—the name of one of the theoretical metals cooked up in the laboratory. And I venture to say it is even less to Breckenridge."

"It is a rare metal, and up to within

a few years it has never been found in a natural state," explained the analyst, mounting and riding his hobby with apparent zest. "A refined product of zirconia, the earth itself, has been used to make incandescent gas-mantles; and it was Leoffroy, of Paris, who discovered a method of electric reduction for isolating the metal. It was a great discovery. The metal, which is very hard, is supplanting iridium for the pointing of gold pens, and its value for that purpose is far in excess of any other known substance."

"But Colonel Craigmiles," said Ballard. "He never ships anything from his mine."

"No? It isn't necessary. He showed us his reduction-plant, run by the water-power in the upper cañon. It is quite perfect. You will understand that the quantity of zirconium obtained is almost microscopic, but since it is worth more than its weight in diamonds, the plant does not require to be very large."

Again the talk veered away from Arcadian affairs, resolutely shunted this time by Ballard. Later on, when Bromley was making up a shake-down bed for the guest in the rear room, the Kentuckian went out on the porch to smoke. It was here that Bromley found him after the Bostonian had been put to bed.

"Where did you get that sample, Breckenridge?" he demanded, without preface.

"I stole it out of one of the bins at the entrance to the colonel's mine."

"And the shots?"

"Were fired at me by one of the night guards, of course. One of them hit the hat, and I was scared stiff for fear Gardiner's sharp old eyes would discover the hole. I'm glad for one thing, Loudon; that the mine is really a mine. Sometimes I've been tempted to suspect that it was a mere hole in the ground, designed to roast the company for damages."

Bromley sat up straight and said: "Or to——" Then he apparently changed his mind and said: "Confound you! you haven't sense enough to stay

in the house when it's raining outdoors! Let me have some of that tobacco—unless you want to hog that, too, with all the other risky things."

XI.

The *fête champêtre*, as Mr. Pelham named it in the trumpet-flourish of announcement, to celebrate the laying of the final stone of the great dam, anticipated the working completion of the irrigation system by some weeks, as such spectacular events not infrequently do.

Nevertheless, on the auspicious day, when the guest-bearing trains began to arrive, matters were well in hand at the focusing-point of public interest.

The spillway gate, designed to close the cut-off tunnel, was in place and ready to be forced down by the machinery; the camp mesa had been cleared of its industrial litter, and a platform erected for the orators and the brass band; and, with the exception of camp cook Garou, busy with his little army of assistants over the barbecue pits, the construction force had been distributed among the sub-contractors on the canals.

In the celebration proper the two engineers had an insignificant part. President Pelham, carrying his two-hundred-odd pounds of avoirdupois as jauntily as the youngest promoter of them all, was master of ceremonies; and the triumphal program, as it had been outlined in a five-page letter to Ballard, ran smoothly from number to number.

With the band and the orators in full swing, Ballard and Bromley lounged on the bungalow porch, awaiting their cue. There had been no hitch thus far. The trains had arrived no more than the inevitable hour or so late; the August day, despite a threatening mass of storm-clouds gathering on the high and far-distant slopes of the background range, was perfect; and the enthusiasm of the celebrators had been carefully worked up to the pitch at which everything is applauded and nothing criticized.

Hence, there was no apparent reason for Ballard's settled gloom, or for Bromley's impatience manifesting itself in sarcastic flings at the company's secretary, an ex-politician of the golden-tongued type, who was the oratorical spellbinder of the moment.

"Pity's sake! will he never saw it off and let us get that stone set?" rasped the assistant, as the crowd cheered, and the mellifluous flood, checked for the applause instant, poured smoothly on.

"The realities will hit us soon enough," growled Ballard. And then, with a sudden righting of his tilted camp-stool: "Look up yonder!"

The porch outlook commanded a view of the foot-hill cañon and the bowl-shaped valley beyond. At the cañon head, three double-seated buckboards were wheeling to disembark their lading; and presently the Castle 'Cadia house-party, led by Colonel Craigmiles, climbed the path to the little level space fronting the mysterious mine.

"They are not coming over here," said Bromley, the rejoinder framing itself upon the fact. Wingfield and Blacklock junior, with the help of the buckboard drivers, were piling the timbers at the mine entrance to seat the party.

It was the colonel's idea, this descent upon the commercial festivities at the dam; and Elsa had exhausted her ingenuity in trying to defeat the project. For weeks her father's attitude had been explainable only upon a single hypothesis; one which she had alternately accepted and rejected a hundred times during the two years of dam-building.

With the inundation of Castle 'Cadia an impending certainty, nothing had been done by way of preparing for it; at least, nothing of any consequence. Coming down early one morning, Elsa had found two men in mechanic's overclothes installing a small gasoline electric plant for the house-lighting; and a few days later she had come upon Otto, the chauffeur, building a light rowboat in a secluded nook in the upper cañon.

But meanwhile the daily routine of the country house had gone on uninterruptedly; and when Mrs. Van Bryck had asked curious questions about what was going to happen when the dam should be completed, she had been laughingly assured in the presence of the others that nothing was going to happen.

That Wingfield knew more, Elsa was certain; how much more, she could only guess. But one thing was incontestable: ever since the break with Ballard he had been a changed man; cynical, ill at ease, or profoundly abstracted, and never more uncompanionable than when he sat down beside her on the timber-balk at the mine entrance to look up and across at the band-stand, the spellbound throng crowding to the cañon's edge, and the spellbinding secretary shaming the pouring torrent in the ravine below with his flood of eloquence.

"What sickening rot!" said the playwright, in open disgust. And then: "It must be comforting to Ballard and Bromley to have that wild ass of the desert braying over their work. Somebody ought to hit him."

But the orator was doing the hitting himself. He was looking over the heads of the celebrators and down upon the group at the mine entrance when he said: "So, ladies and gentlemen, this great project, in the face of the most obstinate, and, I may say, lawless, opposition; in spite of violence and petty obstruction on the part of those who would rejoice in its failure; this great work has been carried to a triumphant conclusion, and we are here to-day to witness the final momentous act which shall add the finishing stone to this magnificent structure; a structure which shall endure and subserve its useful and fructifying purpose so long as these mighty mountains rear their snowy heads to look down in approving majesty upon a desert made fair and beautiful by the hand of man."

Hand-clappings, cheers, a stirring of the crowd, and the upstarting of the brass band climaxed the rhetorical peroration, and Elsa looked anxiously

over her shoulder. She knew her father's temper and the fierce quality of it; but he was sitting quietly between Dosia and Madge Cantrell, and the publicly administered affront seemed to have missed him.

When the blare of brass ceased, the mechanical part of the spectacular held the stage for a few brief minutes. The completing stone was grappled by the hooks of the derrick-fall, and at Ballard's signal the hoisting-engine besprinkled the spectators liberally with cinders, the derrick-boom swung around, and the stone was lowered skilfully into place.

With a final rasping of trowels the workmen finished their task, and Ballard stepped out upon the masonry and laid his hand on the wheel controlling the drop gate which would cut off the flow of the river through the outlet tunnel. There was an instant of impressive silence, and Elsa held her breath. The day, the hour, the moment which her father had striven so desperately to avert had come. Would it pass without its tragedy?

She saw Ballard give the final glance at the gate mechanism; saw President Pelham step out to give the signal. Then there was a stir in the group behind her, and she became conscious that her father was on his feet; that his voice was dominating the deep-toned droning of the torrent and the muttering of the thunder on the far-distant heights.

"Mistuh-uh Pelham, and you otheh gentlemen of the Arcadia Company, you have seen fit to affront me, suhs, in the most public manneh, befo' the members of my family and my guests. Neve'theless, it shall not be said that I failed in my neighborly duty at this crisis. Gentlemen, when you close that gate——"

The president turned impatiently and waved his hand to Ballard. The band struck up "The Star-Spangled Banner," a round ball of bunting shot to the top of the flagstaff over the band-stand and broke out into a broad flag, and Elsa saw the wheel turning slowly under Ballard's hand. The clapping and

cheering and the band clamor drowned all other sounds; and Elsa, rising to stand beside Wingfield, felt rather than heard the jarring shock of an explosion punctuating the plunge of the great gate as it was driven down by the geared power-screws.

What followed went unnoticed by the cheering, clapping spectators crowding the cañon brink to see the foaming, churning torrent recoil upon itself and beat fiercely upon the restraining gate and steep-sloped wall of the dam's foundation courses. But Elsa saw Ballard shrink as from the touch of a hot iron; saw Bromley run out quickly to lay hold of him. Most terrible of all, she turned suddenly to see her father coming out of the mine entrance with a gun in his hands—saw and understood.

It was Wingfield who came to the rescue.

"Be brave!" he whispered. "See—he isn't hurt much." And then, to the others: "The show is over, good people, and the water is rising to cut us off from luncheon. Shall we mount and ride?"

Dispersal followed, and at the retreating instant Elsa observed that her father hastily flung the rifle into the mine; remarked this, and had a glimpse of Ballard and Bromley walking together toward the shore along the broad coping of the dam.

At the buckboards, Wingfield stood her friend again. "Send Blacklock down to see how serious it is," he suggested, coming between her and the others; and while she was doing it, he held the group for a final look down the cañon at the raging flood still churning and leaping like a wild thing imprisoned at its barriers.

Young Blacklock was back almost immediately with his report. Mr. Ballard had got his arm pinched in some way in the gearing at the gate-head; it was nothing serious, and he sent word that he was sorry that the feeding of the multitude kept him from saying so to Miss Elsa in person. Elsa did not dare to look at Wingfield; and in the buckboard, seating for the re-

turn to Castle 'Cadia, she contrived to have Bigelow for her companion.

In the office room of the adobe bungalow Bromley was deftly dressing and bandaging a deep bullet score across the muscles of Ballard's arm; a wound painful enough, but not disabling.

"What do you think now?" he asked, in the midst of the small surgical service.

"I don't know what to think, Loudon. You are sure it was the colonel who fired at me?"

"I saw all but the trigger-pulling, you might say. When Mr. Pelham cut him off, he turned and stepped back into the mouth of the mine. Then I heard the shot, and saw him come out with the gun in his hands."

"Humph!" said Ballard, wincing under the bandaging. "We're on the wrong track, all of us. Wingfield and you and I had it figured out that the colonel was merely playing a cold-blooded game for delay. That is a false scent, Loudon. There was nothing to be gained by killing me to-day."

Bromley shook his head. "It's miles too deep for me," he admitted. "Three nights ago, when I was up at the castle, the colonel spoke of you as he might speak of the man whom he would like to have for his son-in-law—good, old, gentlemanly Kentuckian stock, and all that, you know. I can't put the two together."

"I'm going to put the two together some day when I have time," said Ballard; and the hurt being repaired, they went out to superintend the arrangements for feeding the visiting throng in the big mess-tent.

After the barbecue and more speech-making, the trains were brought into requisition, and the various tours of inspection through the park ate out the heart of the afternoon for the visitors. Bromley took charge of that part of the entertainment, leaving Ballard to nurse his sore arm and to watch the slow submersion of the dam as the rising flood crept in little lapping waves up the sloping back wall.

The August sun beat fiercely upon the deserted construction-camp, and

the heat, rarely oppressive in the mountain-girt altitudes, was stifling. Down in the cook camp, Garou and his helpers were washing dishes by the crate and preparing the evening luncheon to be served after the crowd returned, and the tinkling clatter of china was the only sound to replace the year-long clamor of the industries and the hoarse roar of the river through the cut-off.

Ballard found the silence even more oppressive than the heat, and to escape both he descended the ravine below the dam and made a careful examination of the ground laid bare by the draining of the tunnel and the artificial stream-bed. The sight was instructive and not particularly reassuring.

The great pit described by Gardiner was no longer a foaming whirlpool, but the cavernous undercutting of the stream was alarmingly evident. In the tunnel the erosive effect of the torrent had been even more striking. Dripping rifts and chasms led off in all directions, and the promontory which formed the northern abutment and anchorage of the dam presented the appearance of a huge hollow tooth.

The extreme length of the underground passage was possibly five hundred feet; but by reason of the great rifts and cavities the engineer was a good half-hour making his cautious way up to the massive stop-gate with the rising flood on its farther side.

The sun was a fiery globe swinging down to the sky-pitched western horizon when Ballard picked his way out of the dripping caverns, shaking his head dubiously. There was six months' work ahead, lining the tunnel with a steel spillway tube and plugging the hollow tooth around it with concrete. And in any one of the one hundred and eighty days the water might find its way through some crevice and the devastating end would come suddenly.

It was disheartening, to say the least, and the Kentuckian's face wore a harassed scowl when Bromley, returning with the excursionists, saw it again.

"What's the matter?" was his query. "Is the arm hurting like sin?"

"No; not more than it has to. But something else is." And he briefed the story of the hollow-tooth promontory.

"Worse, and more of it!" was Bromley's comment. Then he added: "I've seen a queer thing, too. The colonel has moved out."

"Out of Castle 'Cadia?"

"No; out of the park. You know the best grazing this time of the year is along the river; well, you won't find hair, hoof, or hide of the cattle anywhere. Also, the ranch is deserted and the corrals are all open."

The harassed scowl took on two added lines.

"What does that mean?"

"You can search me," was the puzzled reply. "But you can bet it means something. I wish we had this crazy crowd out of the way."

"We'll get rid of it pretty early. I've arranged that with Mr. Pelham. To get the people back to Denver by breakfast-time the trains will have to leave here between eight and eight-thirty."

"That's good, as far as it goes. Will you tell Mr. Pelham about the rotten tooth?—to-night, I mean?"

"Surely," said Ballard; and an hour later, when the luncheon in the mess-tent was over, and the crowd was gathered on the camp mesa to wait for the fireworks, he got the president into the bungalow office, and shut the door, and fired the disheartening petard.

Singularly enough, as he thought, the promoter did not appear to be profoundly moved; and, thinking he had not made the discouragement plain enough, Ballard went over the situation again.

"Another quarter of a million will be needed," he summed up; "and we shouldn't lose a day in beginning. And, of course, it will delay the land sales in the flood area. The settlers who would buy and locate in the bottom lands before we have filled that hollow tooth would take their lives in their hands."

"Oh, I think you're a little nervous to-day, Mr. Ballard," was all the satisfaction he got. "We'll go on with the ditch work and let this matter rest for

awhile. But a word in your ear; not a syllable of this to any one, if you please. It can do no good, you know, and it might do a great deal of harm. I shouldn't even tell Bromley, if I were you."

"Bromley knows."

"Well, see to it that he doesn't tell. And now I must really beg to be excused. My duties as host——"

Ballard let him go, and sat for an hour in reflective silence while the fireworks fizzed and blazed from the platform on the mesa's edge and the full moon rose to peer over the background range, paling the reds and yellows of the rockets. He was still sitting where the president had left him when Bromley came in to announce the close of the *fête champêtre*.

"It's all over, and they're taking to the Pullmans. You don't want to go to the foot of the pass with one of the trains, do you?"

"Not if you'll go. I'd like to stay here to-night."

"All right," said Bromley cheerfully. "I'm good for that much more; and I can come back from Ackerman's on one of the engines in the morning." Then he asked the question for which Ballard had been waiting. "How did Mr. Pelham take it?"

"He took it easily; a great deal too easily, Loudon. There's something wrong, somewhere."

Hoskins, engineer of the first section, was whistling for orders, and Bromley had to go.

"I've heard a thing or two myself," he averred. "I'll tell you about them in the morning. The company's secretary has been making stock transfers all day—when he wasn't speechifying. There's something doing, and Mr. Pelham is doing it."

Ballard got up and went to the door with the assistant.

"And that isn't all," he said, with an air of sudden conviction. "This isn't an irrigation scheme at all, Loudon. It's a stock-deal from first to last. Mr. Pelham knows about that hollow tooth—he knew before I told him. You

mark my words: we'll never get orders to plug that tunnel!"

Bromley nodded assent. "I've been working my way around to that, too. All right; my resignation goes in to-morrow morning, and I suppose yours will?"

"I guess so; I've been half-sorry I didn't saw it off short with Mr. Pelham when I had him here. Good night. Don't let them persuade you to go over the pass. Stop at Ackerman's and get what sleep you can."

Bromley promised; and a little later Ballard, sitting in the moonlight on the bungalow porch, heard the trains pull out.

"I shouldn't be much surprised if you never came back to Arcadia," he said, apostrophizing the departing president. Then he put away the business entanglement and let his gaze go in the opposite direction; toward the great house in the upper valley.

At the first glance he sprang up with an exclamation. The house was there, looming shadowily in the moonlight, with a broad sea of silver to take the place of the brown valley level in the bridging middle distance. But the curious thing was the lights, unmistakable electrics they were, as heretofore, twinkling through the tree-crownings of the knoll.

Ballard got up and went to the edge of the mesa cliff to look down upon the flood, rising now by imperceptible gradations as the retreating slopes made the area of the reservoir lake larger. It was fully half-way up the back wall of the dam, which meant that the colonel's power plant at the upper cañon must be submerged. Yet the lights were on at Castle 'Cadia.

While he was speculating over this new mystery, the four head-lamps of an automobile came in sight on the roundabout road, and presently a big tonneau car, well filled, rolled silently over the plank bridge below the dam and pointed its four monster eyes up the incline leading to the camp mesa. When it came to a stand at the cliff's edge, Ballard saw that it held Mrs. Van Bryck, Bigelow, and one of the

Cantrell girls in the tonneau; and that Elsa was sharing the driving-seat with young Blacklock.

"Good evening, Mr. Ballard," came from the shared half of the driving-seat. And then: "We are out trying the new car—isn't it a beauty?—and we thought we'd make a neighborly call. Aren't you glad to see us? Please say you are."

XII.

The ornate little French clock, Bromley's testimonial from his enthusiastic and admiring classmates of the Ecole Polytechnique, had tinkled the hour of ten; the August moon rode high above the deserted bunk shanties and the dismantled machinery on the camp mesa; the big car, long since cooled from its climb over the hogback hills, cast a foreshortened shadow like that of a squat band-wagon on the stone-chip whiteness of the cutters' yard; and still the guests lingered on the porch of the adobe bungalow.

For Ballard, though he played the part of the somewhat puzzled host, the prolonged stay of the touring-car party was an unalloyed joy.

When he had established Mrs. Van Bryck in the one easy chair, reminiscent of Engineer Macpherson and his canny skill with carpenter's tools, and had dragged out the blanket-covered divan for Miss Cantrell and Bigelow, he was free to sit a little apart with Elsa on the porch step.

The long strain of the industrial battle was off. Having fully determined to send in his resignation in the morning, the burden of responsibility was measurably lightened. And, to cap the ecstatic climax, Miss Elsa's mood was not mocking; it was sympathetic to a degree.

Only young Blacklock's restlessness sounded a jarring note in the theme. When the collegian had tinkered with the car to the stopping of its motor and the extinguishing of its headlights, he had taken to the desert of stone chips, rambling aimlessly, but never, as Ballard observed, far enough to lose sight of the white wall of masonry, the

growing lake in the cañon rift, or the rocky hillside of the opposite shore. It was the latest of the little mysteries. When the Kentuckian came to earth long enough to remark it, he fancied that Jerry was waiting for something; waiting and possibly watching.

It was after Mrs. Van Bryck, plaintively protesting against being kept out so late, had begun to doze in her chair, and Bigelow had fetched the wraps from the tonneau wherewith to cloak a shuddery Miss Cantrell, that Elsa said guardedly: "Don't you think it would be an unmitigated charity to these two behind us if we were to share Jerry's wanderings for a little while?"

"I'm not sharing with Jerry, or any other man, just now," Ballard objected; but he rose and walked with her to the foot of the great derrick, pulling out one of the stone-cutters' benches for a seat. Before he could take his place beside her, Blacklock got up from behind a block of stone a few yards away and called to him. "Just a minute, Mr. Ballard," he said; "I've got a rattler under this rock." And Ballard excused himself and went.

"Where's your snake, Jerry?" he asked, coming up with a stick.

"Cut it out," said the collegian, mumbling so that Miss Craigmiles should not overhear. "I've been trying to get a word with you all evening, and I had to invent the snake. Wingfield says we're all off wrong; 'way off. You're to watch the dam—that's what he said: watch it till he comes down. That's all."

"It was a false alarm," said Ballard, when he rejoined Elsa. "Jerry's got a bad case of ennui. You were saying——?"

"I wasn't saying anything, but I mean to. You must be dying to know why we are here—why we are staying so long."

"I'm not," he answered, out of a full heart. "My opportunities to sit quiet in blissful nearness to you haven't been so frequent that I can afford to spoil this one with askings about the whys and wherefores."

"Hush!" she broke in imperatively.

"You are jesting again in the very thick of the miseries. I brought you out here to tell you something. Your life was attempted again to-day: do you know by whom?"

"Yes." He answered without thinking, and could have bitten his tongue for it the moment afterward.

"Then you doubtless know to whom all the terrible happenings, the—the—*crimes*, are chargeable?"

Denial was useless now, and he said "Yes," again.

"How long have you known this?"

"I have suspected it almost from the first."

She turned upon him like some wild creature at bay.

"Why are you waiting? Why haven't you had him thrown into prison, like any other common murderer?"

He regarded her gravely. No man ever quite understands a woman; least of all the woman he knows best and loves most.

"You seem to forget that I am his daughter's lover," he said, as if that settled the matter beyond question.

"And you have never sought for an explanation?—beyond the one which would stamp him as the meanest, the most despicable of criminals?"

"I have; fruitlessly, though, I think, until to-day."

"And to-day?" she questioned feverishly.

He paused, picking and choosing among the words. And in the end he merely asked her to help him. "To-day, hope led me over into the valley of a great shadow. Tell me, Elsa, dear, is your father always fully accountable for his actions?"

Her hands were tightly clasped in her lap, and there were tense lines of suffering about the sweet mouth.

"You have guessed the secret—my secret," she said, with the heart-break in her tone. And then: "Oh, you don't know what agonies I have endured; and alone—all alone!"

"Tell me," he commanded lovingly. "I have a good right to know."

"The best right of all—the right of a true friend." She stopped, and then

went on despairingly: "It is in the family. Do you—do you know how your father died, Breckenridge?"

"In an illness, I have been told. I was too young to realize anything about it."

"No," she denied sorrowfully. "He was poisoned; by a horrible mistake. My father and his brother Thomas were practising physicians in Lexington, your old home and ours. Uncle Tom was called to prescribe for your father—his oldest and most valued friend. By some frightful mistake the wrong drug was given, and your father died. Poor Uncle Tom paid for it with his reason; and then father threw up his profession and buried himself here, in Arcadia."

The Kentuckian remembered Colonel Adam's sudden seizure at his first sight of the dead Ballard's son, but he said gravely: "That proves nothing, you know."

"Nothing of itself; but I have seen with my own eyes. Two years ago, after the trouble with Mr. Braithwaite, father seemed to change. He became bitterly vindictive against the company at times, and put his whole soul into the fight against it. Then the accidents began to happen, and—oh, I can't tell you the dreadful things I have seen, and the more dreadful ones I have suspected! I have watched him, following him when he did not suspect it. After dinner, the night you arrived, he said he must come down here to the mine. As soon as I could, I followed, and saw him throw the stone from the top of that hill. And that other night, when Mr. Bromley was hurt; after you had gone, I looked for father and could not find him. A little later he came in hurriedly, secretly, and he would not believe me when I told him that Mr. Bromley was hurt; he seemed to be sure it must be some one else. Then I knew. He had gone out to waylay you."

She was in the full tide of the miserable confession now, and he tried to stop her.

"No; I must go on," she insisted. "Mr. Wingfield knows, too, but unlike

you, he has not tried to be charitable. He——"

"He doesn't love you as I do," Ballard interrupted.

"Don't," she said. "That is the bitterest drop in the cup. You refuse to think of the heritage I should bring you; but I think of it—day and night. When your telegram came from Boston to Mr. Lassley at New York, I was starting for France, for Paris, to see if I couldn't persuade Doctor Perard, the great specialist, to come over and be our guest at Castle 'Cadia. It seemed to be the only hope. But when you telegraphed, I knew I couldn't go; I knew I must come home. And in spite of all, he has tried three times to kill you, and it is only by God's mercy that he hasn't succeeded. You know he must be insane; tell me you know it, Breckenridge," she pleaded.

"Since it lifts a burden too heavy to be borne, I am heartily glad to believe it," he rejoined tenderly. "I understand quite fully now. And it makes no difference—between us, I mean. You must not let it make a difference. Where did you leave your father?"

"After dinner, he went with Mr. Wingfield and Otto to the upper cañon. There is a breakwater which they hoped might protect the laboratory. They were going to strengthen it with bags of sand. I was afraid he might come down here later—and that you might be alone and unsuspecting."

From where they were sitting, at the foot of the derrick, the great boom leaned out over the cañon lake with its shadow cleanly cut on the surface of the water. Ballard's eye had been mechanically marking the line of shadow and its changing position as the water-level rose in the rift.

"The reservoir is filling much faster than I supposed it would," he said. "I cannot account for it."

"There have been storms on the range all day," she replied. "Father has a series of electrical signal stations in the upper cañon. He says the rise in the river will be phenomenal to-night."

Ballard nodded. "Yet he has done

nothing to prepare for it at Castle 'Cadia?"

"Absolutely nothing, except to rearrange the house lights. And that is another proof of what we both believe. Would any sane person refuse to tell his guests what was impending?"

Again Ballard made the sign of acquiescence, but this time he qualified it.

"None the less, he has prepared for it in other ways. The cattle have all been driven out of the river valley below, and the ranch is deserted. And some one told me to-day that the mine over yonder had been abandoned."

His mention of the zirconium mine found them both looking across the chasm, when a huge slice of the dump slid off and settled into the depths with a splash. The king's daughter rose, steadying herself by the hook of the derrick-fall. The Kentuckian got upon his feet and stood beside her.

"What do you see?" he asked.

"The door!" she said, pointing; "it was closed when we came out here. I am sure of it!"

It was open now, at all events; and presently she went on in a frightened whisper: "Look! there is something moving—among the ore-bins!"

The moving object defined itself quickly for the two at the derrick-heel, and for another—young Blacklock, who was crouching behind his block of stone directly opposite the mine entrance. It took shape as the figure of a man, slouch-hatted and muffled in a long coat, creeping on hands and knees toward the farther dam-head; creeping by inches, and dragging what appeared to be a six-foot length of gas-pipe. The young woman's whisper was full of sharp agony.

"Oh, Breckenridge! it's father—just as I have seen him before! He is going to do something desperate—*can't* you stop him?"

There are crises when the mind, acting like a piece of automatic machinery, flies from suggestion to conclusion with such lightninglike rapidity that all the intermediate steps are slurred. Ballard saw the inching advance, realized its

object, and saw that he would not have time to intervene by crossing the dam, all in the same instant. Another click of the mental mechanism and the alternative had suggested itself, was weighed, measured, and transmuted into action.

The looped-up derrick-fall was a double wire cable, carrying a heavy iron pulley with the hooks and grappling-chain. Released from its rope lashings at the mast-heel, it would swing out and across the cañon like a huge pendulum.

It was a gymnast's trick, neatly done. Ballard forgot his bandaged arm when he grasped the pulley-hook and slashed at the rope lashings with his pocket-knife; forgot it again when the released pendulum swept him out over the chasm.

There was a cry from Elsa, Blacklock's yell from higher up the mesa, and the quick *pad, pad* of footfalls as of men running.

In mid-air Ballard had a glimpse of two figures racing down the cañon toward the mine; then the wire-rope pendulum reached the extreme of its arc, and the Kentuckian dropped, all claws to clutch and tensely strung muscles to hold, fairly upon the crouching man in the raincoat.

What happened during the next half-minute resolved itself for Blacklock, racing around to the battle-ground by way of the dam, into a fierce hand-to-hand struggle for the possession of the length of gas-pipe.

At the pendulum-swinging instant, the collegian had seen the sputtering flare of a match, and in the dash across the dam he had a whiff of burning gunpowder.

When the two rose up out of the dust of the grapple, Ballard was the victor, and he turned to hurl the gas-pipe bomb with a mighty cast upstream. There was a splash, a smothered explosion, and a geyserlike column of water shot up, to fall in silvery spray upon the two newcomers edging their way cautiously over the crumbling mine dump.

So much young Blacklock saw in

passing. A moment later he had wrapped Ballard's antagonist in a wrestler's hug from behind, and the knife raised to be driven into the Kentuckian's back clattered upon the stones of the path. Then the collegian tackle, with his chin buried between the shoulders of his man, heard swift footsteps upcoming, and the deep boom of a musical voice saying: "Manuel, you grand scoundrel—drop that thah gun, suh!"

Something else, metallic and heavier than the knife, rattled upon the stones, and Blacklock loosed his hold upon the desperate one. Ballard stooped to pick up the knife and the pistol. Wingfield, who was the colonel's second in the race along the half-submerged mine path, drew back; and master and man were left facing each other.

The Mexican straightened up and folded his arms. He was gasping from the effect of Blacklock's wrestler-hug, but his dark face was as impassive as an Indian's. The King of Arcadia turned to Ballard, and the mellow voice broke a little.

"Mistuh Ballard, you are a Kentuckian, suh, of a race that knows well the meaning of loyalty. You shall say what is to be done with this po' villain of mine. By his own confession, made to me this afte'noon, he is a cutthroat and a murderer. Undeh a mistaken idea of loyalty to me"—the deep voice grew more tremulous at this—"undeh a mistaken idea of loyalty to me, suh, he has been fighting in his murderous way what he conceived to be my battle with the Arcadian Company. Without compunction, without remo'se, he has taken perhaps a dozen lives since the day when he killed the man Braithwaite and threw his body into the riveh. Am I making it cleah to you, Mistuh Ballard?"

How he managed to convey his sense of entire comprehension, Ballard never knew. One thought was submerging all others in an upheaving wave of joy: the colonel was neither a devil in human guise nor a maniac—Elsa's trouble had vanished like the dew on a summer morning.

"Thank you, suh," said the deep voice, more brokenly than before. "I am not pleading for his life. By all the laws of God and man he has forfeited that. How long this would have gone on, if I hadn't suhprised him in the ve'y act of trying to kill you as you lowered that thah stop-gate to-day, I don't know. That lies heavy on my conscience, suh; I ought to have suspected it. What will you do with him?"

"Nothing, now," said Ballard gravely, "except to ask him a question or two." And then to the assassin, standing like a carved image in the colonel's cast-off raincoat: "Did you kill Macpherson, as well as Braithwaite and Sanderson?"

"I kill-a dem all," was the cool reply. "You say—he all say—I make-a de dam." I'll say: 'You no make-a de dam w'at de colonel no want for you to make.' Dass all."

"So it was you who hit Bromley on the head and knocked him into the cañon?"

The foreman showed his teeth. "Dat was bad *meestake*. I'll been try for knock you on de haid dat time, for sure."

"Once more," said the Kentuckian, bent upon resolving the last vestige of mystery; "did you happen to be wearing that raincoat the night you hit Bromley?—and that other night when you heaved a stone at my office over yonder?"

The Mexican nodded. "I wear heem w'en de sun gone down—same like de colonel."

"That will do," said Ballard grimly, and then to the colonel: "I think we'd better be getting over to the other side. The ladies will be anxious. Jerry, take that fellow on ahead of you, and see that he doesn't get away. I'm sorry for you, Colonel Craigmiles, for I do know what loyalty—even mistaken loyalty—is worth. My own grudge is nothing—I haven't any. But there are other lives to answer for. Am I right?"

"You are quite right, suh; quite right," was the sober reply; and then

Blacklock said "*Vamos!*" to his prisoner, airing his one word of Spanish; and in single file the five men crossed the dam to the camp side of the lake, where Bigelow with Elsa and Madge Cantrell and a lately awakened Mrs. Van Bryck were waiting. Ballard cut the colonel's daughter out of the group swiftly, masterfully.

"You were wrong—we were all wrong," he whispered joyously. "The man whom you saw, the man who has done it all without your father's so much as suspecting it, is Manuel. He has confessed; your father is as sane as he is blameless. There is no obstacle now, even for you. I shall resign to-morrow morning, and——"

It was the colonel's call that interrupted him.

"One moment, Mistuh Ballard, if you please, suh. Are there any of your ditch camps at present in the riveh valley below this?"

Ballard shook his head. "No; they are all on the high land now. But why?"

"Because, suh, befo' morning dawns they would be in great dangeh. Look thah!"—waving an arm toward the dissolving mine dump on the opposite slope—"when the water reaches that tunnel, Mistuh Ballard, youh dam's gone."

"But, colonel; you can't know positively."

"I do, suh. And Mistuh Pelham knows quite as well as I do. You may have noticed that we have no pumping machinery oveh thah, Mistuh Ballard; *that is because the mine drains out into youh pot-hole below the dam.*"

"Heavens and earth!" ejaculated Ballard. "And you say Mr. Pelham knows?"

"He has known it all along. I deemed it my neighbo'ly duty to info'm him when we opened the loweh level in the mine. But he won't be the loseh; no, suh; not Mistuh Howard Pelham. It'll be those po' sheep that he brought up here to-day to be shorn—if the riveh gives him time to make the turn."

"The danger is immediate, then?" said Bigelow questioningly.

The old King of Arcadia stood on the brink of the mesa cliff, a stark figure in the white moonlight, with his hand to his ear. "Hark, gentlemen!" he said. "Your ears are all younger than mine. What do you hear?"

It was Ballard who said: "The wind is rising on the range. I can hear it blowing through the forest."

"No, suh; it isn't the wind—it's water; floods of it. There have been great storms up above all day—storms and cloudbursts. See that!"

A rippling wave a foot high came sweeping down the glassy surface of the reservoir lake, crowding until it doubled its depth in rushing into the foot-hill cañon. Passing the mine, it took away another slice of the dump; and an instant later the water at the feet of the onlookers lifted like the heave of a great ground-swell—lifted, but did not subside.

Ballard's jaw was outthrust. "We did not build for any such test as that," he muttered. "Another surge like that——"

"It is coming!" cried Elsa; and Madge Cantrell shrieked and took refuge under Bigelow's arm.

Far up the silvered surface of the lake a black line was advancing at railway speed. It was like the flattening of the sea before a sudden squall; but the terror of it was in the peaceful encompassments. No cloud flecked the sky; no breath of air was stirring; the calm of the summer night was unbroken save by the surflike murmur of the great wave as it rose high and still higher in the narrowing raceway.

Instinctively Ballard put his arm about Elsa and drew her back from the cliff's edge. There could be no possible danger for those standing upon the high mesa; yet the menace was irresistible.

When the wave entered the wedge-shaped upper end of the cañon it was a foam-crested wall ten feet high, advancing with the black-arched front of a tidal billow, mighty, terrifying, the cold breath of it blowing like a chill

wind from the underworld upon the watchers. In its onrush the remains of the mine dump melted and vanished, and the heavy timbering at the mouth of the tunnel was torn away, to be hurled, with other tons of floating debris, against the back wall of the dam.

Knowing the conditions, Ballard thought the masonry wall would never outlive the terrific impact of the wreck-laden billow. Yet it stood, apparently undamaged, even when the splintered mass of wreckage whirled with the crest of the wave high over the coping, to plunge into the ravine below. It was like some massive fortification, reared to endure such shocks; and Elsa, standing beside her lover like a reincarnation of one of the battle-maidens, gave him his meed of praise.

"You builded well—you and the others," she cried. "It will not break!"

But even as she spoke, the forces that sap and destroy the strongest barrier were at work. There was a hoarse roar from the underground caverns, as of a volcano in travail. The wave retreated for a little space, and the white line of the coping showed bare and ghastly in the moonlight.

Silence, the deafening silence which follows the thunderclap, succeeded to the clamor of the waters, followed by a curious whistling as of some vast vessel emptying itself through an orifice in the bottom.

The colonel was standing at the derrick's foot. He turned with arms outspread and swept the watchers, augmented now by the men from Garou's cook camp, back and away from the dam-head. Out of the water-worn pit in the lower ravine a great jet of water was spurting intermittently, like the blood from a severed artery.

"That settles it!" said Ballard hoarsely; and just then Blacklock shouted, and the Mexican broke away, to dart across the white path of the coping course.

He was half-way over when his nerve failed. The spouting fountain in the gulch below, or the sucking whirlpool in the lake above, one or both turned his blood to water, and he

went upon hands and knees to crawl and to hug the stones. The delay was the tempting of fate. While he clung limpetlike to the rocks the great wall lost its perfect alinement, sagged, swayed outward under the mountainous pressure above, and was gone in a thunderburst of sound that stunned the watchers and shook the solid earth of the camp mesa where they stood.

"Was it all a horrid dream?" asked the young woman in a white morning-gown of the man with his arm in a sling who sat beside her swaying hammock under the tree-pillared portico at Castle 'Cadia.

It was a Colorado mountain morning of the flawless kind, and they were postponing their breakfast until the others should come down. Save for the summer-dried grass, lodged and leveled by the water, the outlook was unchanged. Through the bowl-like valley the Boiling Water, once more an August-dwindled mountain stream, wound as before; and a mile away in the foothill gap, the great derrick lined itself against the sky.

"It wasn't a dream," said Ballard. "The twenty-mile, roundabout drive home, with a half-wrecked railroad bridge for a crossing, ought to have convinced you of that."

"Nothing convinces me any more," she said; and when he would have gone into the particulars of that, the colonel came out.

"Ah, you younglings!" he said, in fatherly benediction. "Out yondeh in the back lot, I run across the Bigelow boy and Madge Cantrell—'looking to see what damage the water had done,' they said, as innocent as sucking-doves. Oveh in the orchard I stumbled upon Mistuh Wingfield and Dosia. I didn't make them lie, and I'm not going to make you two. But I do want a word with you, Mistuh Ballard."

Elsa got up to go in, but Ballard sat in the hammock and drew her down beside him. "With your permission, which I was going to ask immediately after breakfast, Colonel Craigmiles, we two are one. Will you so regard us?"

The colonel's mellow laugh had nothing of reprobation in it.

"It was a little matteh of business," he said. "Will youh arm sanction a day's travel, Mistuh Ballard?"

"Surely. This sling is Miss Elsa's invention."

"Well, then; afteh breakfast Otto will drive you to Alta Vista in the light car. From there you will take the train to Denver. When you arrive you'll find the tree of the Arcadian Company pretty well shaken, I think; don't you, suh?"

"Doubtless."

"Ve'y good. Quietly, and without much—ah—ostentation, you will pick up, in youh name or mine, a safe majority of the stock. Do I make myself cleah?"

"Perfectly."

"Then you will come back to Arcadia, reorganize youh force—you and Mistuh Bromley—and build you anotheh dam in the location where it should have been built befo'. Am I still cleah?"

"Why, clear enough, surely, colonel. But I thought—I've been given to understand that you were fighting the irrigation scheme on its merits—that you didn't want your kingdom turned into a farming community. I don't blame you, you know."

The old cattle king's gaze went afar, through the gap in the foot-hills and beyond to the billowing grass-lands of the park, and the shrewd old eyes lost something of their fire when he said:

"I reckon I was right selfish about that, at first, Mistuh Ballard. It's a mighty fine range, and I was greedy for the isolation, as some otheh men are greedy for money and the power it brings. But this heah little girl of mine she went out into the world, and came back to shame me, suh. Here was land and a living, independence and happiness, for hundreds of the world's po' strugglers, and I was makin' a cattle paschuh of it. Right then and thah was bo'n the idea, suh, of making a sure-enough kingdom of Arcadia; but Mistuh Pelham and his money-hungry crowd got in the way.

Theiuh idea was to sell the land, and to make the water an eve'lastin' tax upon it; mine was to make the water free. They elected to fight me, suh, and, please God, you've seen the beginning of the end that is to be. But come on in to breakfast; you can't live on sentiment for always, Mistuh Ballard."

They went in together behind him, the two for whom Arcadia had become paradise, and on the way the Elsa whom Ballard had first known and learned to love in the far-distant world beyond the mountains reasserted herself.

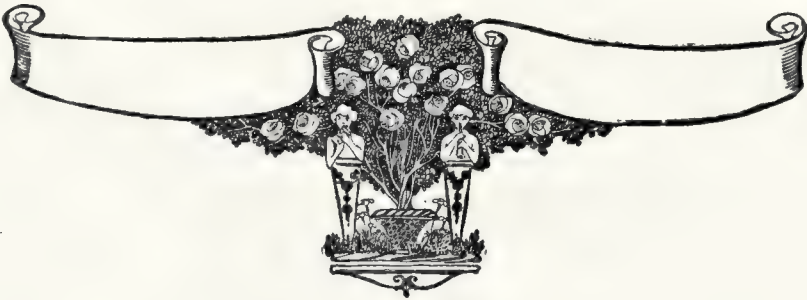
"What will Mr. Pelham say when he hears that you have really made love to the cow-punching princess?"

she asked flippantly. "Do you usually boast of such things in advance, Mr. Ballard?"

But his answer ignored the little pin-prick of mockery.

"I'm thinking altogether of Colonel Adam Craigmiles, my dear, and of the honor he does you by being your father. He is a king, in every inch of him, Elsa, girl." And later, when the house-party guests had gathered in good old Kentucky fashion about the breakfast-table, he stood up with his hand on the back of Elsa's chair and lifted his water-glass. "A toast with me, good friends—my stirrup-cup, if you please: Long live the King of Arcadia!"

And they drank it standing.



IN PRIMITIVE FASHION

A GOOD story has been brought back from the West of Ireland by a motorist whose chief delight is in exploring out-of-the-way places. It concerns the rising little seaside town of Lahinch, a place which is being developed through the tourist and golf booms.

A few years ago the public baths, like most other institutions in the village, were very primitive. They were situated in a little cottage, which was just above the high-water mark.

Shower sea-baths were a specialty, and they were to be had in a room which had a bathtub placed in the middle of the floor.

On pulling a string, a perfect deluge of bracing sea water came through the ceiling.

A lady visitor once stood ready in the tub, and gave the dread signal.

But instead of the usual avalanche of green water, there came from aloft the gruff voice of the fisherman-proprietor of the baths.

"If ye'll move a taste more to the west, ma'am," said the voice, "ye'll get the full benefit af the shower."

Looking up, she, to her horror, descried the old fisherman standing by an aperture in the ceiling, and holding a barrel of sea water ready for the douche!

Whether the lady moved to the west and received the shower or not, the chronicler does not relate. But Lahinch has made giant strides onward since.

A Night With Lising Jimmie

By W. B. M. Ferguson

Author of "Garrison's Finish," "The Third Degree," Etc.

It is not always wise to set down the man with a lisp as lacking in strength of mind or depth of character. The lisp of Lising Jimmie was about the most deceptive thing you can imagine. For behind it was an unusual man, a man with tremendous potentiality. When such a man looms on the horizon you may expect things to happen; and they do on this eventful night of which Mr. Ferguson writes.



NE of Jimmie Blunt's peculiar beliefs is that chance plays a very small part in criminal annals, and that, in nine cases out of ten, a crime, if traced back far enough, will lead you to another. Jimmie has many peculiar beliefs, and, being the best man the Central Office owns, can afford to air them in company with his physical peculiarities—a soft lisp, eye-glasses, and a cane. In fact, "Lising Jimmie," as he patters down the street, his cane tapping, tapping the sidewalk, his supposedly near-sighted eyes peering up at one like a rabbit, has many times been mistaken for the guileless fool he looks. But no one makes that error twice.

Being "headquarters man" for the *Star*, I am a particular friend of Jimmie's, and I know that the non-magnifying glass of his spectacles is the least thing about him that conveys one impression while meaning another. But even I do not know him well. I suspect that he has as much potentiality as a stick of dynamite, and is as unostentatiously dangerous. Also, I think he possesses the most accommodating memory of any one I ever met. It is like a sensitized film; faces, events—everything he has ever encountered is photographed upon it indelibly, ready for instant reproduction.

His mental Rogues' Gallery is perfect. He knows the history of every prominent crime the world over as well as you may know the stock market—and even on the latter Jimmie could give you a rub, for his rôles on life's stage have been many. To finish, he is a mimic of the first water. All these assets stand him in excellent stead in his rôle of crime-detector. Perhaps the "Boulevard Affair" offers the most complete example of his peculiar genius.

I suppose you all remember that affair at the Boulevard Hotel. It happened three summers ago. It was a murder case, and New York had it every morning for breakfast for close on to a week. Of course, Inspector Jones got all the credit for the round-up, the press boomed him along, and everybody was satisfied—even Lising Jimmie, who played out the hand alone.

Jimmie sidesteps the press, for, as he has carefully explained to me, anonymity is his capital. "And how," he says, "can you hope to run down a criminal if he knows you the moment you turn a corner? Give all the puffs to the seats of the mighty," he adds, "and let me continue to draw my fifty a week and go on striking in the dark—I'll always strike something."

Reporters are natural liars, but you won't be long in the "Row" if you have not learned to lie with discretion.

Therefore, I have always respected Lipping Jimmie's wishes as regards publicity, and consequently have been rewarded by his confidences which, more than once, have developed into a "beat." But the Boulevard affair is over now, and a "story" even a few hours old is ancient scrip to the press—worthless stuff. Again, Jimmie foams at the mouth when he sees a magazine. He never reads one, for he is a reformed author himself. Therefore, I can give the inside history of that famous case with perfect freedom.

It was a hot night in late July when the news of a mysterious murder and robbery at the Boulevard Hotel came over the wires, and almost the first person I saw as I swung out for Broadway was Lipping Jimmie himself.

"Ha! the carrion thents the corpth from afar, eh, Billy?" he said, as we boarded a north-bound car together. "S'death! Blood! Blood and money, Billy! Blood and money! They alwayth go hand in hand."

"They say it's a big thing," I ventured, my nerves tingling. I was young then, and a night with Lipping Jimmie was like an electric shower-bath. You never knew when a shock was coming or from where.

"What lie did they hand you?" said Jimmie, tapping his patent-leathers with his cane.

"One of the patrons of the hotel found stabbed to the heart half an hour ago. Had been dead only a short time. Money, watch—everything gone," I said. And I ran on regarding surmises, possible clues, etc.

"Thank you," drawled Jimmie, as I finished. He was openly flirting with a girl across the car. "Have you then the new show at the Broadway?"

That is Jimmie's way. He is a natural-born clam-opener, but his mouth or ears don't leak a drop. Nor could I get a word from him on the way up to the hotel.

"Tag on. Keep mum and you'll hear the band play—I think," was all he would say.

We found the Boulevard more quiet

than we expected. The first batch of reporters, officials, ghouls, etc., that every crime attracts, had come, and Dunn, the manager, had seen that they had gone when their business was over. Dunn's as jealous of his hotel's reputation as he is of his own.

"It's a devil of a business," he confided to us in his private office. "Why can't a man see to it that he's murdered decently in his own place or in the street instead of musing up hotels? We don't give murder policies with our rooms." He smiled grimly as he turned to Jimmie. "You old stormy petrel! there's nothing doing in your line to-night. The thing's a mystery—cuss it!"

"Think tho?" yawned Jimmie, carefully selecting the most comfortable chair in the room. "Tell uth how it happened before we go up to view the thenery. Been claimed yet?"

Dunn shook his head. "His name was Boyd. You'll see him up-stairs, for the coroner's as slow as a funeral. Mr. Boyd came last week, registering from Chicago. We gave him room two-fifteen——"

"Who's on the other thide?" said Jimmie.

"Two-fourteen is a Mrs. Hammond, a deaf old party. Two-sixteen is vacant. No rooms opposite. Single corridor. Oh, there's nothing doing there. It must have been an outside job. They all agree on that."

"Who got next?" drawled Jimmie, head in hands.

"Bell-boy twenty-one," said Dunn, paring his nails. "He was up with ice-water in the second corridor, and while passing two-fifteen he noticed that the door was ajar. He thought that queer, as there was no light. Now, Mr. Boyd wore some costly jewelry, and he never checked it at the desk. I often said he would be robbed if he wasn't more careful, but he always laughed at me. He took his own risk. So twenty-one thought something was wrong. He knocked, and, getting no reply, entered. Mr. Boyd, fully dressed, was stretched across the bed, stabbed to the heart."

"Weapon found?" I asked.

"No," said Dunn laconically.

"What would you value the mithing jewelry at?" said Jimmie, nursing his knee.

Dunn considered. "It wasn't phony. I'm a pretty fair judge. Well, I know he wore three rings, sleeve-links, watch, and scarf-pin, which I should say summed up about a couple of thousands. Of course, he very likely had more in his room, and then there was his wallet."

"Came off about ten, eh?" said Jimmie pleasantly. "No noise or anything? Funny. Motive, robbery. Outside job. H'm." And he commenced to hum softly to himself. When Jimmie hums, things are just about beginning to move. "Let's go on up, Billy," he said to me, after a moment's solo. "And, say, Dunn, give us bell-boy twenty-one to light the way. No chance of him being the murderer, eh?"

Dunn laughed softly.

"Oh, you detectives! Yes, he's very likely your man. Of course, he's only fourteen, and with a good record. But those little details don't matter. He's been questioned to a standstill. He and the staff have been searched. Merely a matter of form, you know."

"And what's your theory?" said Jimmie idly.

"Simply that it's an outside job, of course," said Dunn testily. "So is it Captain Crowe's opinion and the other fellows'. It's the only one that will hold water. Very simple, too. A sneak-thief gets in—in big hotels you can't watch everybody—and goes to Mr. Boyd's room. Mr. Boyd had left his door open, or maybe the thief used skeletons. Very likely Mr. Boyd was asleep, lying down after dinner, and the thief killed him before he could cry out. Then the thief quietly makes his escape."

"Highly probable," said Jimmie, as bell-boy twenty-one appeared, to conduct us up-stairs. He was a nice little boy, with frank gray eyes, and, despite the gruesome affair, cheerful and loquacious.

In the death-room a big policeman

was sitting stolidly, but, on our entrance, Jimmie gave him the high sign, and told him to wait in the corridor until he had finished. There was an uneasy atmosphere in the corridor, though the hour was late, and most of the guests on that floor had given notice of their leave-taking. The fact that the body of the murdered guest had not been removed acted like a hurry-call upon the Boulevard's tenants.

Lisping Jimmie carefully removed his light summer gloves, stood his inseparable cane in a corner, and approached the huddled, sheet-covered thing on the bed while I occupied a chair by the window. The bell-boy, with round eyes, was watching Jimmie's educated fingers as they felt and probed the wound.

"Must have scared you, sonny, when you ran into this in the dark," commented the detective conversationally.

"Yes, sir," said Buttons.

"How did you know at first he was dead and not merely sleeping?" said Jimmie. "I suppose you lit up first?"

"Yes, sir," said Buttons.

"And then you looked in the mirror—and saw Mr. Boyd lying dead on the bed, eh?" added Jimmie. "And it gave you such a scare you spilled a lot of ice-water on that bureau-cover, eh?"

Buttons' eyes, as did my own, strayed to the slightly wet splash on the immaculate bureau-cover. I had not noticed it until Jimmie had mentioned it.

"Yes, sir," said the bell-boy again.

"Just so," said Jimmie, and, raising his clenched fist, he struck the chest of the corpse a resounding blow.

"Good night, sir," said Buttons, going to the door. Evidently Jimmie's weird pugilistic exhibition had disturbed him, as it had me.

"Good night," said Jimmie, without looking round. "Here, boy. Wait a minute. Bring me that chair there. No, not that one—yes, that Morris chair."

It was a very heavy chair, of solid oak, and the bell-boy, though willing, could not lift it. I got up to help him, when Jimmie cut in: "Never mind. I'll sit here on the bed."

"All right. Good night, sir," said the boy again.

"Good night," said Jimmie, and, getting up before the retreating Buttons, calmly locked the door. Then he sat on the bed, chin in hand, and his eye-glasses raked number twenty-one through and through.

"Well," he said quietly, at length.

"What, sir?" said Buttons placidly.

"Where have you hidden them?" snapped Jimmie sharply, leaning forward. "Out with it, now."

"What——" began the boy.

But, in a flash, Jimmie was off the bed and was shaking Buttons noiselessly, savagely, until I thought the boy's head would fly off. Then the detective flung him up against the wall, slapped him across the face, and stood over him, his eyes as cold and malignant as a cobra's.

"You don't lie to me," he said quietly. "I know your kind and what medicine you want—a good smash in the mouth, and you'll get it, too! That's all you're afraid of—manhandling. Where's that jewelry? I'll give you just one chance. The cop's out there in the hall. Open up sharp or I'll knock you hell-west-and-crooked and see that you go up for this murder."

Then, for the first time, I noticed that "Lisping Jimmie's" soft lisp had disappeared. Then I knew that he was out for blood.

The bell-boy looked at Jimmie—only once. His face paled, and he commenced to squirm. He wasn't the kind that cries.

"I—I didn't kill him. Honest," he said sullenly.

"I know that already," said Jimmie, with a shake. "But you came in here to rob him, you little skunk, when you found his door open. Then you saw murder had been done, and you cleared out with the stuff before giving the alarm. Where did you hide it?"

"Will you let me off?" said the boy nervously.

"Maybe," said Jimmie tersely. "I'm after bigger game—you rat! Now, smoke up fast. I haven't the time to

search for it, but I'd get it if I did; don't fool yourself on that."

"I bunked it in the water-cooler, in the hall," said Buttons, with an ingenuous sniff.

"Get it. Go with him, will you, Billy?" said Jimmie, turning to me. "Bring him back with you."

I went with him. Buttons shied as he passed the waiting policeman.

Law in full regalia seemed to impress him more than the undress article. In a turn of the corridor stood a large silver water-cooler on an onyx table. Buttons, after a careful look round, raised the lid, put down an arm into the ice-water, and brought out a dripping hand in which lay a collection of jewelry. I recognized, among the articles, Billy Dunn's mental inventory. But there was one article that looked out of place—a long, steel hat-pin with a cross hilt like a sword.

"It was a dead safe bunk," grinned Buttons to me. "I'd 'a' got them out to-night, all right." He seemed impervious to morality.

"I'd like to pay your funeral expenses," was all I said as I accompanied him back to the death-room. I was wondering how and where Lisping Jimmie had acquired his profound knowledge of the hotel bell-boy. I was learning rapidly.

Without a word, Jimmie took the jewelry I handed over. He examined it, humming softly to himself. The rings, etc., he laid on the bureau, but the watch and hat-pin he retained. He opened the back of the watch. I noticed his innocent-looking eyes narrow behind their glasses. Then he turned to Buttons, who was in two minds whether to smile at his recent narrow escape or to look for further trouble.

"Where did you find this?" asked Jimmie slowly, balancing the hat-pin in his hand.

"On the bureau," said Buttons.

"You may go," said Jimmie curtly. "I'll see Dunn about you later." For a minute or so my friend sat silently on the bed, chin in one hand, the hat-pin lying idly in the palm of the other.

Then he handed it to me. "Nice little article, eh?" he said.

I examined it curiously. It was about six inches long, of finely tempered steel, and its cross hilt was studded with imitation rubies. The blade, perhaps, was a sixth of an inch wide.

"The weapon?" I asked slowly.

Jimmie nodded. "I knew it must be something like that. The man hardly bled at all, the puncture was so small."

"*Cherchez la femme?*" I asked. "Of course it's a woman's."

Jimmie grunted. "That was driven up to the hilt. The man's chest is powerfully developed—hard as steel. Could a woman's strength have been behind the blow? Not on your life. It must have been a terrific, instantaneous blow, killing immediately."

"Suicide——" I began.

"Be blowed!" said Jimmie. "Nor was Boyd asleep, either, when his finish came. The blow was struck upward—from a short, strong man. The wound is on the right side, too."

"What of it?" I asked.

"Nothing," said Jimmie laconically. "I guess we're through here."

He wrapped the jewelry in his handkerchief and thrust it into his pocket. "I want to see Dunn again. Come in."

"Well, any news?" said Dunn half-ironically, as we entered his office.

Jimmie shrugged his shoulders. "Don't understand the case at all. Surely some one must have heard an outcry or some conversation."

Dunn impatiently shook his head. "I tell you no. All that ground has been worked over. The east room next door is vacant and the one on the other side is occupied by a half-invalid—an old lady, as deaf as a post. She couldn't hear Gabriel's trumpet. She's half-scared to death over the affair, and has already given us notice that she intends leaving to-night."

"Well, a lot of them are going," yawned Jimmie. "You can't really blame them. But I'd like to question that old party. Old women as a rule don't let much escape them. Probably she knows something and is afraid

to tell for fear of the consequent publicity."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Dunn, with another shrug. "She's been interviewed to death already, and she's cranky over it. I doubt if she will see you. Still—— Why, hello! Here she comes, now."

A very old lady leaning on a cane had shuffled out of the elevator. She was of medium height, with snow-white hair. She wore spectacles, and was quietly but richly dressed in a mourning-veil and widow's weeds.

Jimmie laughed as he turned away. "I guess I'll renig. A widow with troubles of her own. There's no information in that old party. Let's smoke a cigarette, Billy, before we hit the fresh air. I'm dead tired."

We seated ourselves in a near-by settee, and Jimmie commenced to describe to me the new play at the Broadway. The widow, Mrs. Hammond, had gone to the desk. She was ludicrously deaf, and spoke to the night clerk and Dunn in a high, querulous, falsetto voice. She carried a small valise, and she must have been a stingy old party, for I noticed she secreted her purse in it.

"I am going to the Alpha Hotel," she said, in answer to the manager's protestation and regret at her leave-taking. "I couldn't sleep in that horrible room for all the world. I am glad now that my trunks did not come here. Kindly have them sent to the Alpha if they arrive before I notify the express-office of my change of address. Please call a cab. No, I don't require any help, thank you. I am not paralyzed," she added haughtily to a porter who had come forward. She marched stiffly to the door, head very erect, and leaning heavily on the cane.

"Highly pleasant old party," commented Jimmie, flipping his cigarette into a cuspidor. "Funny how a little accident will disturb some people. Come on, Billy. Good night, Dunn. Much obliged. See you some other time when there's more doing."

The highly pleasant old party was climbing stiffly into a cab as we reached the sidewalk. "The Alpha Hotel," we

heard her order querulously to the driver.

Jimmie indolently watched it start off, then he seized me suddenly by the arm and dragged me with him into one of the string of hotel cabs waiting at the curb.

"Keep that cab for the Alpha Hotel in sight," he ordered sharply to the driver. "Keep half a block behind." And Jimmie rode with his head partly out of the window. "No stepping in one door and out another with me," he chuckled half to himself.

"Where are we going?" I asked impatiently.

"To hear the band play," said Jimmie grimly. I knew enough not to ask further questions. But I was very much in the dark.

In twenty minutes we had drawn up at the Alpha Hotel.

"Quick," said Jimmie, flinging cabby a dollar. "She's gone in. Round to the entrance on the side street."

"But——" I began. But Jimmie had me by the arm and we were racing up the avenue. We halted at the corner.

"Here she comes," said my companion tensely, after an anxious minute. I followed Jimmie's eyes down the quiet, darkened street. The little old lady had emerged from the hotel entrance.

"Making for Sixth Avenue. Come on," said Jimmie again.

Mrs. Hammond boarded a south-bound train at the Thirty-third Street station, and Jimmie and I watched her from the next car. She got off at Eighth Street, and we kept a respectful distance in the rear. It was tedious work, for Mrs. Hammond crawled along, and my curiosity and impatience were at the boiling-point.

We followed her up Eighth Street to Fifth Avenue, and then north to Tenth Street. She stopped for a long time on the corner, and we jumped into a doorway. Then, finally, the little old woman turned east. Between Fourth and Third Avenues she entered a small, old-fashioned, red-brick house. We

waited five minutes before ascending the steps.

"Rather late for a call," grinned my companion. "This is a rooming house. Quite respectable, too. I know it very well." There is no person or house or thing in New York that Lispering Jimmie does not know.

In answer to our ring, a sleepy-looking German maid came to the door.

"Hello, Pretty!" said Jimmie. "Haven't seen you for some time. Heart-broken. No, we don't want a room. Friends of the lady who just entered. Mrs.——"

"Fortescue," said the girl, as Jimmie stopped to agitate his memory.

"Exactly," said Jimmie. "This is an early morning call. No, never mind, we'll go right up. Oh, it's all right; old friends, you know. She is expecting us. Private business—lawyers, and all that. Top floor front? Thanks! All right, won't be a minute. Come on, Billy. Much obliged."

By this time Jimmie had closed the door and was half-way up-stairs, sublimely oblivious of the girl's feeble suggestion that it was late, and that Mrs. Fortescue would, no doubt, prefer receiving the gentlemen in the parlor. A cyclone could not stop Lispering Jimmie.

We knocked at the door of "top floor front." A light was showing through the transom.

"Well?" said Mrs. Hammond's (or Fortescue's) querulous voice.

Jimmie pitched his accommodating voice into the maid's sleepy Germanic gutturals. "Telegram, madame. Immediate."

"All right. Slip it under the door, though I don't know whom it can be from," said the old party.

Jimmie chuckled noiselessly.

"Must sign for it, madame."

"I can't be bothered. Sign it yourself," came the sharp reply.

"Madame forgets I cannot write the English," said Jimmie.

"Nuisance," said the high falsetto through the door. "Wait a minute, then."

We waited. Then the door was

opened a crack. In a flash, Jimmie's cane, followed by his foot, was shoved through the opening. A quick shove—Jimmie's as strong as he doesn't look—and we were in the room, the door closed behind us. My companion leaned against the door, his hand thrust negligently into his coat pocket.

Mrs. Hammond stood confronting us. She had started back, momentarily bewildered by our abrupt and entirely unlooked-for entrance. She was in a long, loose kimono. It was a strong, hard face that I saw, now that it was unveiled and directly under the gaslight. And it was not an old face. Her youthful-looking steel-blue eyes were snapping behind the spectacles. She held both arms folded across her breast; the right hand lost in the left sleeve of the kimono, the left hand in the right sleeve.

"Well?" she said at length hotly. "What does this impertinence mean?"

"Take your hands out of those sleeves," said Jimmie quietly but savagely. "I've seen that trick in Chinatown before this. I've a gun here in my pocket, and I'll loose off through the coat before you know what's hit you."

"What do you mean?" began the woman shrilly. "How dare you—"

"Billy," cut in Jimmie, "catch hold of her wrist—stand to one side so I can blow her head loose if she moves. That's it. No, *no*—not that one. The left wrist, Billy, the *left*. That's it. Don't bat a winker, Mrs. Hammond, or it's good-by for yours. There, I thought so!"

I had wrenched a revolver from Mrs. Hammond's hidden left hand. It was a big hand. The woman stamped her foot in a fury.

"Cowards! Can't a woman protect herself—"

"Take her hair off, Billy," said Jimmie calmly. His gun was in his hand now, and it was as steady as his voice and eye. "Take it off, Billy. Don't be afraid. Don't move, Mrs. Hammond, you're not ready to die just yet. There! Now, don't you look real pretty, eh?"

I stepped back with an involuntary cry of amazement and repulsion. Following Jimmie's strange instruction, I had laid hold of the woman's wealth of snowy hair—and it had come away in my hand. In its place was a huge, prison-cropped head.

And then, as I was gazing at this horrible-looking thing in the long kimono—this thing in the woman's dress with a man's head—its face livid with baffled venom, it suddenly snarled like a wild beast. In one instantaneous movement it had turned savagely upon me and struck—I went down before a crashing blow on the jaw. I remember hearing Jimmie laugh softly as the kimono sprang over me toward him. I waited for his gun to boom out, but it did not. Instead, like a striking snake, he reversed the heavy police revolver he held, sidestepped as gracefully and quickly as a champion bantam-weight; and then, as the kimono came in upon him, the butt of the revolver crashed twice upon the vast acreage of prison-cropped head.

When I came to, the kimono sat huddled up on a chair, blood drying a muddy brown upon head and neck and face; handcuffs snaffling the wrists together. I do not care ever to see again the look that the half-closed eyes held.

Jimmie was seated on the bed, nursing his knee and humming softly.

"Sorry you caught it," he said, as I rose, my head singing. "I should have warned you that we were after dangerous game, but I thought you already guessed that. I've sent for the hurry-up wagon. Know who our friend is over there?"

"No," I said gloomily. I had lost one of my favorite teeth.

"It's Stevie Brown," said Jimmie pleasantly, "alias the Skirt, alias Old Mother Hubbard, alias Left-handed Stevie. Remember him? Well, it doesn't matter. It's the first time I've seen him, too, or his pal, Mr. Boyd, alias Big Red, alias Chicago Thompson. And their faces have never been in the gallery. They're too cute—but Boyd's in the past tense now, and this

gentleman soon will be. But I know their records, eh, Stevie, boy?

"I guess I know how it all happened. Both you and Red pulled off that big Chicago robbery three years ago, and Red peached on you, and got off with the stuff while you went up. You broke jail last week and came on here to square the deal. Red had been successful and was a high-roller, knowing his face wasn't known here, and that swell hotels are not generally the place we are supposed to look for your breed. You ran him down. You can play a skirt to the limit, and you got the room next his in the Boulevard.

"You knocked at his door to-night—the corridor is lonely at that hour—and he recognized you. You made out you had forgiven the dirt he did you, and while talking to him—probably planning over a new deal—you stabbed him with the hat-pin you wore. You cleaned it and left it on the bureau to make us think it was a love-affair and an outside job. For that reason you didn't take his stuff.

"You couldn't light out on the minute, but you made a good excuse. But, Stevie, boy, I know that outside jobs aren't pulled off that way. If skeletons had been used, more than one room would have been robbed. If Boyd's door had been accidentally open, Boyd would have been asleep, and you know that he wasn't stabbed while lying or even sitting down. And, Stevie, wronged women don't leave behind something to trace them by. You over-shot yourself by cleaning the hat-pin. That showed that it had been left deliberately, not merely in forgetfulness.

"Now, it so happened that a dirty little bell-boy unconsciously helped you by helping himself. That baffled us for awhile, for it looked like robbery, too. But I know bell-boys. You made a big mistake by not taking Red's watch. That first put me on your trail.

You didn't know, maybe, but it was the one he got in the Chicago robbery. He could dispose of the rest of the stuff, but he was afraid of the number the watch carried. But I remembered the case and movement numbers.

"Then, the murderer was left-handed, for the wound was on the right side—not the left, as it should have been if the murderer was right-handed. The strength of the blow could only have come from a man. At first I suspected Buttons, but when he couldn't lift a heavy chair he couldn't drive that hat-pin up to the hilt in solid muscle. Still, there it was—a woman's. So, from the watch, I knew that Boyd must be Big Red. Also that you had broken jail and that you might very well be the man we wanted.

"I knew your reputation, and so I put it down that you were Mrs. Hammond. Everything pointed that way. I watched you as you paid your bill at the desk. You used your left hand exclusively, and you carried your purse in a satchel, because men, however clever, cannot always find a woman's pocket; eh, Stevie? I was dead sure of you, and I guess you know the rest. I'm merely pointing out the mistakes you made—for you'll never make another."

"Clever," sneered the felon, his mouth working. "But I'll square you yet, if I have to break a hundred jails. See if I don't. You'll get Red's dose, all right."

"Thanks," laughed Jimmie. "But there's the patrol-wagon, I think, at the door, so you'll have to wait indefinitely. I'm willing."

Such was my night with Lisper Jimmie. It was proof of his contention that one crime, if followed far enough back, will lead you to another. And subsequent events have rather inclined me to this belief.



O'Rourke, the Wanderer

By Louis Joseph Vance

*Author of "Terence O'Rourke, Gentleman Adventurer," "The Private War,"
"Faraday Bobbs, Free Lance," Etc.*

II.—CAPTAIN HOLE, OF THE "PELICAN"

(A Complete Story)



THAT ill wind it was that blew Colonel O'Rourke into Athens, so far as concerns this story, at least, is neither here nor there. It has blown itself out and been forgotten this many a day, praises be! But that, once it had whisked him there, immediately it subsided and obstinately refused to rise again and blow him forth upon his wanderings, in the course of time had grown to be a matter of grievous concern to the Irishman.

'Twas the divvle's own luck, to his way of thinking; and a most misfortunate matter entirely. He resented it enormously (he was not the most patient soul in the world), and, brooding over this sad state of affairs, fell into a temper sullen and black—a rare enough thing with the wooer of fortune to be remarkable. You're no friend of the O'Rourke's if you're able to conceive of his normal disposition as being anything but essentially sunny and devil-may-care.

This is not saying that he had not reason enough to be disgruntled. In the first place, O'Rourke had little love for a Greek; and at that season of the year there were more Greeks in Athens than you could shake a stick at (the colonel's own words): Greeks from Constantinople, from Cairo, the Levant, Roumania—Greeks foregathered from the uttermost ends of the earth, whither they had strayed in their covetous pur-

suit of money. O'Rourke holds a Greek a shade more acute in a bargain than a Jew; and infinitely less trustworthy.

What few Europeans lingered in the Grecian capital were sub-attachés of the diplomatic and consular services, lashed to their posts by the bonds of their insignificance. For it was May, and the hot weather was setting in with a will—and there's your second reason for O'Rourke's disgust at his inability to get away. Athens in winter, Athens leavened with its gay little European resident and tourist colony, he could endure; but Athens in summer, hot, inconceivably dusty, flea-bitten, and infested besides with Greeks of all shades of rascality, who held family reunions in the public squares, and preempted all the desirable tables at restaurants and theaters, smoking their atrocious cigarettes and insulting their systems with their unspeakable national drinks—yes, Athens in summer was all but intolerable.

Furthermore, O'Rourke had a very pressing reason for wishing to get on his way farther east; a reason not unconnected with the tide of his finances, which was, as usual, at its ebb.

With his habitual candor, he would have told you so himself quite freely; the sole (and sufficient) reason why he didn't move on was that vexatious deficit in the budget. There was money waiting for him over there (with a jerk of his head toward the east); money enough for a regiment. He only

lacked the few sovereigns to take him to it, and—and to pay his hotel bill.

There he sat, a great hulking Irishman, eating his head off in idleness, and running up a perfectly staggering score at the Grand Bretagne, while a fortune hung ripe to drop in his hands no farther away than Burma. If he could only get to Alexandria, now—there was a lad he knew there; a broth of a boy named Danny, running, if report was right, a wine-shop, and that prosperous! Danny Mahone was his name, and a better valet no man ever wanted, and the very boy for O'Rourke, as ready with his fists as with the blacking-brush, and readier with a gun than either.

You may picture O'Rourke to yourself, revolving this unhappy predicament in his mind, seated by a little table in the purple shadow of the Zappeion, on (say) the last of the many weary afternoons he spent in that spot, which had become his favorite in Athens—if, indeed, anything Athenian can be said to have found favor in his eyes.

A tall man he was (if you've not met him before), whose cleanly modeled body and limbs did justice to a suit of white drill, which, in its turn, was a credit to his tailor. He would be wearing a becoming coat of tan on a face something lean in contour, but not unhandsome, and rendered the more attractive when he smiled—which he did as frequently as possible. A countenance, moreover, illuminated beneath its level brows by eyes of frank Irish blue, in whose depths twin imps of humor and recklessness ever lurked. Add to this shoulders broad and well pulled back—no man ever carried himself with an air more militant—and a habit of holding his chin a trifle high and looking down good-naturedly at an amusing world; and you have Terence O'Rourke.

But that would be O'Rourke in action, rather than sulking because he had kicked his restless heels in one spot for upward of four weeks. Draw down the lines of that wide-lipped, mobile mouth, and stir up the devils in his eyes until they flicker irritability; and there's

the man who sat by the little table, alternately puffing at a mediocre cigarette and sipping from the demi-tasse of black coffee at his elbow.

Now, on this afternoon that was to be his last in Athens (though O'Rourke had no suspicion of that happy fact), just as the sun was sinking behind the mountains, and Hymettus was clothing its long slopes in its vague violet light of mystery and enchantment—and it was for this sight alone that O'Rourke took himself daily to the Zappeion—just as this was happening, the Irishman's somber meditations were interrupted.

"Phew! Hotter'n the seven brass hinges of Hades!" remarked a cheerful voice, not two feet from his ear.

O'Rourke turned with imperceptible surprise—he was not easily startled. His face lit up with an engaging smile of welcome; for the speaker used English, and any man who spoke that tongue was welcome in Athens just then—not to say a rarity.

"True for ye," assented O'Rourke cordially; and took stock of the stranger, who, using his weather-wise remark for an introduction, calmly possessed himself of the vacant chair at the other side of the table, and grinned amiably.

He showed himself a man no whit inferior to the Irishman, as to height; as for breadth, he was some ten pounds the heavier of the two. He lacked, otherwise, O'Rourke's alert habit—was slower, of a more stolid and beefy build. The eyes that met O'Rourke's were gray and bright and hard, pouched, and set in a countenance flaming red—a color partly natural and partly the result, apparently, of his stroll through the heated streets.

As for the man's dress, it was rough, and there was this or that about it, little things all but invisible to a casual eye, to tell O'Rourke more plainly than words that his profession was something nautical—most probably that of a captain, considering also a certain air of determination and command that lurked beneath his free-and-easy manner. Therefore, having summed up

the stranger in a glance, O'Rourke inquired quite blandly:

"And when did ye get in, captain?"

The man started in his chair, and cast a frightened—at least, a startled—glance at O'Rourke. Then, seeing that he smiled in a friendly fashion, calmed down and continued to cool his face and heat his blood by fanning himself vigorously with his hat.

"Ow the deuce did *you* know I was a captain?" he demanded, with a slightly aggrieved manner.

"It shouldn't take a man an hour to guess that, captain—any more than it should to pick ye out for an Englishman."

The captain stared, gray eyes widening. "An' perhaps you'll tell me my name next?" he suggested rather truculently.

"Divvle a bit. 'Tis no clairvoyant I am," laughed O'Rourke. "But I can tell ye me own. 'Tis O'Rourke, and 'tis delighted I am to meet a white man in this heathen country. Captain, your hand!"

He stretched forth his own across the table and gripped the captain's heartily.

"Mine's Hole," the latter informed him, still puffing. "William Hole, master of the *Pelican*, British freighter, just from Malta."

"And bound, captain dear——?" O'Rourke insinuated gently.

"For Alexandria. Honly hin" (the captain had intermittent difficulty with his aitches, but never missed the initial letter of his name, curiously enough) "for a day or two, to pick up a bit of stuff from a chap down at Piræus. Thought 'ow as I'd take a run up and see the city, 'aving a night free."

"Surely," sighed O'Rourke, a far-away look in his eyes. "For Alexandria, eh? Faith, I wish I might sail with ye."

Again the captain eyed O'Rourke askance. "Wot for?" he demanded directly. "The *Pelican's* a slow old tramp. You can pick up a swifter passage on 'alf a dozen boats a day, down to the port."

"'Tis meself that knows that, sure," assented the Irishman. "'Tis but the

matther of a thrifling difficulty about passage money that detains me. Likewise," he pursued boldly, with a confidential jerk of his head, "there's a bit of stuff—no matter what—that I don't want to pass through the custom-house at Alexandria. I'm not saying a word, captain, but if I could smuggle it into Egypt without paying the duty, the profit would be great enough to pay me passage money a dozen times over. I'm saying this to ye in strict confidence, for, being an Englishman, ye won't let on."

"Not a bit of it," Hole asserted stoutly. "Umm—— Er—I don't mind sayin' to you, Mr. O'Rourke, that I sometimes find it profitable to do a little in that line myself. *Being* a casual tramp, and sometimes laid by for weeks at a stretch for want of a consignment——"

"Not another word, captain. I understand perfectly. There's the handsome waiter. Will ye have a bit of a drink, now?"

Captain Hole would. "It wouldn't 'urt to talk this over," he remarked. "Per'aps we might make some sort of a dicker."

"Faith, 'tis meself that's agreeable," laughed the Irishman lightly.

And when, at midnight that night, he parted from a moist and sentimental sailor man, whose capacity for liquor—even including the indescribable native retsinato and masticha—had proved enormous, the arrangement had been arrived at, signed, sealed, and delivered by a clasp of hands. And it was O'Rourke who was the happy man.

"'Tis Danny who'll be giving me the welcome," he assured himself, sitting on the edge of his bed and staring thoughtfully into the disheveled depths of the battered steel kit-box that housed everything he owned in the world—for he was packing to join the *Pelican* at noon of the morrow.

"I hope to Hiven he has five pounds," announced O'Rourke later, pursing his lips as he thought it out.

Five pounds happened to be the sum he had agreed to pay Captain Hole for the accommodation, it being understood that the sailor was to accompany the

adventurer ashore, and not part from him till the money was forthcoming. A condition that irked the Irishman's soul.

"Why could he not take me word for it?" he demanded of the midnight darkness that was tempered by feeble lamp-light in his bedroom. "Am I not a gentleman? But, faith, I forget that I'm dealing with one who's not. Besides, I'm sure to find Danny."

He arose and resumed his packing, blowing an inaudible little tune through his puckered lips. "Divvilish awkward if I don't— By the gods! I'd all but misremembered."

He neglected to state exactly what he had misremembered, but stood motionless, with troubled eyes, staring at the lamp flame, for a full five minutes. Then—

"I'll have to chance it," he said slowly. "'Tisn't as if 'twere mine."

He unbuttoned the front of his shirt and drew forth a small chamois-skin bag about the size of a duck's egg, from which dangled the stout cord by which it had been slung about his neck.

Holding this gingerly, as if he feared it would explode, O'Rourke glanced at the window—where, happily, the blind was drawn tight—and tiptoed to the door, to make sure that the key was turned in the lock. Then, returning to his bed and keeping out of range of the keyhole, he cautiously loosed the draw-string at the mouth of the bag.

Something tumbled out into his palm and lay there like a ball of red fire, brilliant and coruscating. The smoky rays of light from the lamp seemed to leap into the heart of the thing and set it all a-quiver with dancing flame of a deep and liquid ruby shade. As the man's hand trembled slightly, shafts of incredibly brilliant light radiated from the jewel's crystal core, and seemed to illuminate all the room with an unearthly glamour.

O'Rourke caught at his breath sharply. "'The Pool of Flame,' those heathen named it," he mused, staring transfixed into its quivering, blood-red depths. "Faith, a good name, though 'tis meself misdoubts that 'The Pool of

Blood' had been a better!—from all I hear and know."

He laughed shortly and guardedly. "And the O'Rourke carries this king's ransom on his person, and will be pawning his guns and sword to-morrow for the wherewithal to pay his hotel bill!"

And, after a bit: "I'd best put it away, I'm thinking. 'Twouldn't be safe to carry it that way any longer. If something should catch in me shirt, on board, and rip it, and Hole should see it—why, me life wouldn't be worth a moment's purchase. I'll hide it in me box there; they'll niver suspect in the world. Why would a man with a jewel like this be reduced to begging a passage to Alexandria? Faith, I hope the captain doesn't get too curious about what I want to smuggle into Egypt!"

He stared a moment longer at the great ruby, whose safe carriage to far Burma had been imposed upon him, a dying trust, by his friend and countryman, the O'Mahoney. And he wondered if he would ever see the ransom promised for its return by the Prince of Burma—the ransom two-thirds of which he had promised to remit to Norah, the O'Mahoney's daughter, back in old Ireland.

"'Tis a long road," he nodded; "and a perilous one. I've given them the slip so far, but they'll be watching for me at the Canal, never fear. The divvle fly away with care. Faith, I'm growing timorous as a child."

With which he thrust the Pool of Flame back into the leather bag, and that into the depths of the kit-box; which he presently locked and noiselessly shoved beneath his bed. After all of which he lay down, with a loaded revolver for a bed-mate, and, with another sigh, slept tranquilly.

II.

Some time in the golden afternoon of the following day, the *Pelican* weighed anchor and slouched with a loaferish air out of the harbor of the Piræus. A thick-set, stodgy boat she was, with a rakish list to starboard, a rusty free-board, from which the paint

was peeling in strips, and a generally truculent swagger (when the screw began to kick up a welter of foam under her stern), that reminded one for all the world of Captain Hole himself in his working clothes.

"Plain Bill Hole," the latter said he preferred to be called. And, "Plain Bill Hole," mused the Irishman, leaning over the forward rail and sucking at a short, black pipe; "faith, not only plain, but even a trifle homely," he amended thoughtfully. "You'd never be taking any prizes for personal pulchritude, captain dear—unless, to be sure, 'twas at a bench show, where I'm thinking ye'd do fine!

"As for meself," he conceded later, "I'm no siren in this rig." And he lifted his eyebrows, protruding his lower lip, as he glanced down over his attire.

It was a strange rig for an O'Rourke to be in; an engineer's blue jumper, much the worse for wear, and a pair of trousers whose seat, O'Rourke maintained, was only held together by its coating of dirt and grease. The trousers, moreover, had been built for a shorter man than the adventurer, and in consequence exposed at their lower extremities immodest exhibits of Irish ankle—a disconcerting sight indeed to one of O'Rourke's native diffidence. His feet were thrust into heelless slippers, also conspicuously lacking at the toes; his undershirt was of blue flannel, whose primal hue was fast merging into spots of drab and black, from exposure to weather and filth; and the belt that held the whole together was nothing more nor less than a spare end of rope.

O'Rourke eyed this get-up with disdain. "Fortunately," he comforted himself, "'twon't be forever that I'll be wearing it."

In the present instance the rig was an advisable thing, since O'Rourke was officially registered on the ship's books as an engine-room helper. The *Pelican* carried no license for passengers; and in view of his avowed purpose, it was held unwise, both by Captain Hole and the Irishman, for the latter to risk de-

tection by appearing "too tony" (the expression is culled from the captain's vocabulary).

Otherwise, it was understood that his duties were to consist of the pursuit of his own sweet will; that he was to occupy a stateroom in the officers' quarters; and that he was to dine at the captain's table.

With this arrangement he was content. Not for an instant would he have consented to herd with the crew—not even for the sake of the Pool of Flame and sweet Norah O'Mahoney—though Hole had attempted to insist upon the advisability of such a course. But there are limits to all things, and O'Rourke drew a line at association with the crew—a nondescript company, half-lascar, half-recruited from the slums of Genoa, Brindisi, Constantinople, and Alexandria; Greeks, Italians, a French thug or two, and as many "Sou'wegians." The engineer was a Tyneside man, who had lost his license in the wine-cup, and, with the second-officer, a lanky Scot, who chose to be called Dennison, rounded out a complement carefully to be avoided, either as a body or individually; more especially on dark nights.

O'Rourke held himself aloof from them, with the exception of the three officers mentioned, not because he feared them in the least, but because he was unaccustomed to mixing with such cattle. Consequently, he enjoyed a rather lonely passage; for Hole was drunk every night and up to noon of every day, and in a villainous temper for the rest of the time, quite naturally; Burch, the engineer, had his hands full making the engines hold together and hammer out their nine or ten knots; and Dennison was uncompanionable—a surly brute who loved trouble for its own dear sake, and was never so happy as when (in his favorite phrase) hammering the fear o' God into this or that hapless member of the crew.

So O'Rourke lounged about the deck, loafing with a right good will, smoking his cuddy and communing with the stars, his memories, and the blue, glimmering tide of the Ægean Sea.

The weather held bland and warm,

each day coming up faultless out of an untroubled sea; and the *Pelican* seemed bound for anywhere at all save Alexandria. For the six days succeeding her departure from the Piræus, figuratively, she stuck her thumbs under her arms, her nose in the air, and lurched casually from isle to isle of the Grecian archipelago, with no apparent purpose. Her course, picked out on the tattered and stained chart (years out of date) of the neighboring seas, resembled as much as anything else a diagram of a sot's progress along a street plentifully studded with saloons.

But if the reason for this leisurely sauntering hither and yon was not apparent to the uninitiated, it was occult to them only. If Captain Hole made no open reference to his business, he was careless about concealing it. The fact alone that the *Pelican* generally laid up in some little-known island harbor for the night was significant; as, for that matter, was the additional circumstance that the captain, accompanied by Dennison, invariably went ashore—both sober!—in a boat pulled by two stupid Sou'wegians, to return toward midnight laden with mysterious parcels, all of which were carted into the captain's stateroom, and there kept hidden.

O'Rourke observed these things with an indifferent eye; and if he took the trouble to put two and two together in his mind, he was also at some pains to keep the sum total to himself.

At length, however, their island itinerary seemed to come to a natural close; the *Pelican's* nose turned south-east, and a course was shaped direct for Alexandria.

On an evening, then, some nine or ten days after he had left Athens, O'Rourke at the forward rail saw the long, low profile of Egypt edge up out of the waters, saw it take color and form, glimpsed the palms and the wind-mills, the lighthouse, and Pompey's Pillar; and knew that he was close upon his journey's end.

The news, presumably, was conveyed to Burch, and he, with the prospect of an orgy ashore that night to spur him, accomplished the all but miraculous

with the engines. The *Pelican* shuddered and stiffened up with a jerk; then, gathering her bedraggled skirts about her and kicking up her heels, made all of eleven knots, and possibly a shade more, for port.

The sun was setting as the ship swung impudently into the western harbor, with a gleam in her eye and a leer for her more reputable sisters, steaming to an anchorage in the lee of the great breakwater, among a throng of Egyptian coasters, canal-boats, lateen-sailed feluccas, a P. & O. liner, and one or two beetling men-o'-war, to say nothing of the lesser fry of the Mediterranean trade.

Her winches rattled blatantly as she dropped anchor, but O'Rourke did not move. There was no going ashore, he knew, until Hole was ready, and that worthy would not be ready until the customs officials had paid him a call and the usual courtesies were exchanged. The Irishman had no need to be in haste to change from his present garb to that which better suited him.

So he lolled upon the rail and regarded with a kindling eye the harbor-scape. To the east the Mohammedan quarter of the city, set upon the peninsula that divides the two harbors, glowed in rainbow hues, lifted out of its squalor and glorified by the setting sun. And the light of Pharos rose a silver star against a sky draped in purple hangings.

Westward an angry sun was sinking in a welter of threatening clouds, painting the troubled waters of the Mediterranean a thousand shades of red and gold.

While to the south again loomed the bulk of the city, huge and dark, a window here and there glaring blood-red—Alexandria, humming with mystery and bending in hopeless torment to the lash of the khamsin, that hot and bitter wind that sweeps down to the coast from the seething deserts, and, once it has started, gives no respite for forty days and nights.

But even the khamsin, with its furnace breath, had not power to make

O'Rourke disapprove. It was all good, all desirable and inviting, in his eyes. For here it is that the East begins, the strange and beautiful, the many-colored, brooding East, with its sights and its sounds, its smells and its perils, peculiar to itself alone; the East that the Wanderer loved.

And he mopped his brow with the back of a hand, and stood erect, exulting in the scent, the indescribable, impalpable, insistent odor of the East that is forgotten of none who has ever known it. The hot khamsin drove it gustily in his face, and he sniffed and drew great lungfuls, and was glad.

"'Tis good," he said simply. And, a bit later, while on the shore-line the brazen arcs were beginning to pop out silently: "There's the customs boat. I'm thinking I'll slip below."

As he turned and sauntered aft to the companionway, he exchanged a nod with Burch, who was mopping his brow in the entrance to the engine-room; and remarked that Captain Hole was with Dennison, at the side, superintending the rigging out of a passenger gangway.

The lamps had not yet been lighted in the saloon, but O'Rourke knew his way to his room. He entered and shut the door. The afterglow of the sunset, entering through the port-hole, rendered the little box of a room light enough for his purposes. Dropping to his knees, the Irishman pulled his kit-box from beneath the bunk.

The lid came up freely as he touched it.

For a full minute he did not breathe. Then, in ominous silence, he bent and examined the lock. It became immediately apparent that his memory had not tricked him; the trunk was locked, as he had left it that morning. But the lock itself had been dealt with by a cold-chisel in the hands of some person or persons unknown.

It was hardly worth the trouble; still O'Rourke rummaged through the contents of the trunk, assuring himself that the chamois-bag and its precious enclosure were gone. So far as he could ascertain, nothing else had been taken.

He shut down the lid and thrust the trunk back under the bunk. Then he sat down to think it out, his eyes hard, his face gone grimly expressionless. Only by the nervous clenching and opening of his hands did he betray his growing rage and excitement. At length he arose, determination in his bearing.

One sentence alone escaped him: "And not even a gun handy!"

He went on deck. Already the tropic night had closed down upon the harbor, but it was easy enough to place the captain and first-officer, who still were waiting at the gangway. Below arose the splutter of the customs launch—a raucous sound, yet one that barely rippled the surface of O'Rourke's consciousness. He stepped quickly to the captain's side and tapped him on the shoulder.

"Captain," he said, "I'll be asking the favor of a word with ye in private."

The captain swung around with an oath, whether of stimulated or real surprise it would be hard to say; O'Rourke's approach had been noiseless because of his slippers, and it was barely possible that neither of the officers had remarked his descent to the saloon.

Hole caught the gleam of the Irishman's eye in the lamplight, and—stepped back a pace.

"Get forrard," he said curtly. "Can't you see the customs officer comin' aboard? I'll see you later."

"Ye will not. Ye'll hear me now, captain."

Hole backed farther away. "W'ot!" he barked hoarsely, raising his voice. "W'ot! I'll show you 'oo's master aboard this ship! Get forrard to your quarters, you— S'helpmebob!" he exploded violently. "'Oo ever 'eard the like of it?"

O'Rourke stepped nearer, his fists closing. "Drop that tone, ye scut!" he cried. "D'ye want me to spoil your little game?"

The shot went home. The captain gasped, and in the darkness O'Rourke fancied that the man lost a shade or two of his ruddy color.

"Wotcher mean?" he demanded, lowering his tone.

"I mean," replied O'Rourke, in a quick whisper, "that the Egyptian customs officer is at the side. Return what ye've stolen this day, or I'll tell the whole harbor what ye've been up to! And, if ye want me to be more explicit, perhaps the word 'hashish' will refresh your memory!"

"I'll talk to you later——"

"Ye'll give me back me property this minute, or——"

O'Rourke was at the rail in a stride. "Shall I tell him?" he demanded.

A swift step sounded behind him, and he turned, but an instant too late. He had reckoned without Dennison. As he moved to protect himself, the first-officer's bony fist, as big as a ham, caught the Irishman just under the ear. And one hundred and seventy-five pounds of bone and malice were behind it.

O'Rourke shot into the scuppers as though kicked by a mule, struck his head against a piece of ironwork, and lay still, half-stunned, shutting his teeth savagely to choke back a moan.

Two figures bent over him, Hole's and the first-mate's; and the captain's voice, guarded but clear enough, came to his ear:

"You'll lie there, me man, and you'll not so much as whimper while the customs officer is aboard. Take 'eed wot I says. Mr. Dennison, 'ere, is goin' to clean his revolver."

O'Rourke lay silent, save for his quick breathing. The first-officer grinned malevolently in his face and sat down near at hand, keeping a basilisk eye upon the prostrate man the while he fondled an able-bodied, hammerless Webley.

Hole moved off toward the gangway, when his voice arose, an instant later, greeting his visitor. The latter put a hurried question, which O'Rourke did not catch, but the captain's reply was quick enough.

"Honly a mutinous dorg of a deck-'and. Wanted shore-leave, and refused to go foward to 'is quarters when hordered. 'E ain't 'urted none. Mr. Den-

nison 'ere just gave 'im a tap to keep him quiet."

The Irishman swore beneath his breath and watched the first-officer. The light from the lantern at the gangway glanced dully upon the polished barrel of the revolver, and the gleaming line was steadily directed toward O'Rourke's head. Upon reconsideration, he concluded to lie still and watch his opportunity; for the present, at least, he did not doubt Dennison's willingness to use the weapon. O'Rourke was to be kept quiet at all hazards, and he knew it full well—for once he conceded discretion the better part of valor, and was patient.

III.

Notwithstanding the fact that the importation into Egypt of the drug known as hashish has been declared unlawful by the Khedival law-makers, it manages to get into the country in large quantities by subterranean—one is almost tempted to say submarine—routes. It is always obtainable in the lower dives of Alexandria, Cairo, and Port Said—if you know where to go.

Manufactured in certain islands of the Grecian archipelago, it is mysteriously exported under the noses of the authorities and Egyptian spies, and, eluding the vigilance of the Egyptian customs, finds a way to its consumers. Speaking baldly, it is smuggled into the land. Which, of course, is very annoying, and sinful besides. The continuance of this illegal traffic vexes the authorities enormously, and the penalties for being caught at it are really quite unpleasant. The customs inspections, moreover, are as severe as might be expected, considering the country and its inhabitants.

O'Rourke, therefore, was not in the least surprised at the briefness of the official visit. The minutes might well have seemed long to him as he lay there, without moving, hardly daring to breathe, but they were not as long as they might have been; for his brain was very active formulating schemes for reprisals. And it appeared to him that

not ten minutes elapsed from the arrival of the customs inspector and his departure over the side again.

Between the two events there was a hurried visit to the saloon, where the lamps were lighted, and from which the clinking of glasses could be heard, together with another clinking that O'Rourke shrewdly surmised to be caused by the contact of coined gold with coined gold. Emerging at length, the inspector, accompanied by an excessively urbane and suave Captain Hole, briefly glanced into the hold, asked a few questions which might have been pertinent had they not been entirely formal in nature, and took his leave.

From the gangway the captain turned directly to his first-officer and the latter's charge. Hearing his approaching footsteps, O'Rourke gathered his muscles together and summoned all his faculties to his aid; for the moment of action was at hand.

"Trouble?" demanded Hole, pausing.

"Not a syllable," said the mate. "Th' mon's sensible. I ha'e ma doots but he's too canny altogether."

"Peaceful as a babby, eh? Well"—savagely—"e'll learn w'ot for. Get up, you Irish—!"

O'Rourke lay passive under the storm of Hole's profanity. He had all but closed his eyes, and was watching the pair from beneath his lashes.

Failing to elicit any response, "'Asn't 'e moved?" demanded the captain.

"Not a muscle——"

"Shammin'. 'Ere, I'll show 'im."

O'Rourke gritted his teeth and suppressed a groan as the toe of Hole's heavy boot crashed into his ribs. He fancied that a rib snapped—knew better; but the pain was really exquisite. But he made no sound. It was his only hope; to deceive and put them off their guard by feigning unconsciousness.

"Th' mon's nae shamming," Dennison declared. "He's fair fainted."

"Fainted nothing!" countered the captain rudely. "Give 'is arm a twist, Dennison."

The mate calmly disobeyed. The

arm-twist desired by the captain requires the use of the twister's two hands, and stoutly as he defended his opinion, the first-officer was by no means ready to put up his revolver.

He advanced and bent over the motionless form of the Irishman. O'Rourke lay like a log, upper lip rolled back to show his clenched teeth. "Heugh!" exclaimed the first-officer, peering into his face. His tone was expressive of the liveliest concern. Without further hesitation he pocketed the revolver, and—received a tremendous short-arm blow in the face.

With a stifled cry he fell back, clutching at a broken nose. O'Rourke leaped to his feet, deliberately put his heel into the pit of Dennison's stomach (thereby effectually eliminating him as a factor in the controversy), and simultaneously advanced upon Captain Hole.

But in the latter he encountered no mean antagonist. The man—it has been said—was as tall as, and heavier than, the adventurer, and by virtue of his calling a competent rough-and-ready fighter. In a breath he had lowered his head, and, bellowing like a bull, launched himself toward O'Rourke.

The Irishman met his advance with a stinging upper-cut, which, however, failed to discourage the captain. In an instant he had grappled, and was belaboring O'Rourke with short, stabbing blows on the side of the head, at the same time endeavoring to trip him. The fury of his onset alone all but carried the Irishman off his feet.

At the same time it defeated Captain Hole's own purpose. O'Rourke watched his chance, seized the man's throat with both hands, and, tightening his grip, fairly lifted him off his feet, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. Then, with a grunt of satisfaction, he threw the captain from him, and turned to face greater odds.

The noise of the conflict had brought the crew down upon the contestants in a trice. It is safe to say that they held neither of their officers in great love, but, on the other hand, O'Rourke was no favorite of theirs, and—shipboard discipline is a strange thing. As it hap-

pened, the adventurer had not quite shaken the last flutter of breath out of Hole's carcass; and even as the latter fell, he grasped the situation and barked an order to the crew.

Inarticulate though it was, they interpreted it correctly, and closed in upon the Irishman without delay. He was surrounded in a trice, and rushed to the rail. With that to his back, he drew on his reserve of strength and began to put up what he has proudly described as the fight of his life—and he was a man who had fought many times and in strange ways.

But now he poised himself on the balls of his feet and watched his circle of assailants with a catlike vigilance. They pushed him close, snarling and cursing like so many curs, but they suffered for their temerity. O'Rourke's blows were lightning quick, from the shoulder, and his fists were as sledgehammers, while his recovery was as fast. Both arms worked like piston-rods. Time and again he landed with such force that he felt flesh crack beneath his knuckles, and, not infrequently, the sharper fracture of a bone. His hands were torn and bleeding almost from the beginning.

Fight as splendidly as he might, however, the pack was too many for him. And when he saw, not in one but in half a dozen hands, the flash of light along knife-blades, he knew that the time was come when he should sever his connection with the *Pelican*. Moreover, he had a shrewd suspicion that the captain was up and only waiting for an opening to use his revolver.

It was hard to leave such a beautiful fight, and sorry he was to feel compelled to do so. But needs must when a Greek on one side, an Italian on the other, and a lascar before you, drive at you with knives.

He delayed not on the order of his going, but leaped to the rail, poised himself, and dived far out from the vessel's side, deep down into the Stygian blackness of the harbor waters.

It was a good, clean dive; he cut the water with hardly a splash, and went down like a plummet, gradually

swerving from the straight line of his flight into a long arc—so long, indeed, that he was well-nigh breathless when he came to the surface, a dozen yards or more from the *Pelican*. He had no time to pause, however, for the chances were that either Hole or Dennison would try to bag him when they saw him on the surface; it was his task to get out of pistol-range as swiftly as might be.

Spitting the foul harbor water from his mouth, and with a swift, furtive glance over his shoulder—a glance that showed him the *Pelican's* free-board like a wall, with a cluster of dark shapes hanging over the rail at the top, vaguely indicated by the lantern-light—he struck out for the nearest vessel, using the double-overhand trudgeon stroke, noisy but progressive.

That he heard no cry when he came to the surface, that Hole had not detected him by the phosphorescence, and had held his hand from firing, at first puzzled O'Rourke; but he accounted for the circumstance by concluding that Hole probably feared to raise an alarm and thereby attract much undesirable attention to himself and his ship. In the course of the first few strokes, however, he managed to peep again over his shoulder, and from the activity of the *Pelican's* decks concluded that he was to be pursued by boat; which, in fact, proved to be the case.

Fortunately, the *Pelican* rode at anchor in waters close-studded with other vessels. There were plenty of hiding-places in and about them on a night as black as that. The adventurer made direct for the first vessel, swam completely around it, and by the time the *Pelican's* boat was afloat and the rowers bending to their oars, was supporting himself by a hand upon the unknown ship's cable, floating on his back with only his nose and mouth out of water.

In such circumstances, it is small wonder that the boat missed him so completely. He saw it shoot by two cable lengths away, the coxswain—Hole himself, if O'Rourke made no mistake—snapping out orders from the

stern. It disappeared amid a confusion of shipping, and did not return.

When he was thoroughly rested and had recovered his lost wind, the Irishman released his hold upon the friendly cable and struck out for the land at an easy pace. What little clothing he wore was no great weight upon him, and he was a strong swimmer. But the lights seemed far, viewed from the level of the water, and the hot kham-sin threw little waves directly in the swimmer's face, blinding and confusing him. He did not intend to exhaust his powers by too frantic endeavor to reach the water-front in the shortest possible space of time; therefore he went at a leisurely rate. But steadily.

Eventually he gained a landing at the end of a quay, upon which he drew himself for a last rest and a partial drying of his dripping garments ere venturing abroad in the streets.

And not until then, strangely enough, did it come to him with its full force, how he had been tricked and played upon, from the very beginning. He swore bitterly when he contemplated his present position, a penniless outcast in a city almost wholly strange to him, without friends—save, indeed, he should stumble across Danny by some rare good chance—with never a place to lay his head, nor even a change of clothing. His kit-box was aboard the *Pelican*, and like to remain there, for all he could do to the contrary. In his present state, to apply to the authorities or to attempt to lodge a complaint against Captain Hole would, more likely than not, result in his incarceration in the municipal jail, on a charge of vagrancy more real than technical.

And—the Pool of Flame! He ground his teeth in impotent rage when he saw how blindly he had stumbled into Hole's trap, how neatly he had permitted himself to be robbed of Norah O'Mahoney's fortune—to say nothing of his own financial independence. For in the light of after events he could not doubt now but that Hole had sought him out armed with the knowledge that O'Rourke was in possession of the priceless jewel—more than probably

advised and employed by one or the other of the parties who had before contested with the Irishman for the title to its ownership.

"Aw, the divvle, the divvle!" complained O'Rourke. "Sure, and 'tis a pretty mess I've made of it all, now!"

With that, he arose and clambered to the top of the quay—with the more haste than willingness, in view of the fact that the splash of oars had come to his ears, while the dimly outlined shape of a boat heading directly for his refuge suddenly became visible. Of course, it might *not* be Captain Hole of the *Pelican*, but O'Rourke was too thoroughly impressed with the conviction that the laws of coincidence were working against him, just then, at any rate, to be taking an unnecessary risk.

Chance, too, would have it that an arc-light should be ablaze precisely at the pier's end. Beneath it the figure of a hulking, black, native representative of the municipal police force, whom he must pass ere he could gain the solid ground, was clearly defined in the white glare.

For this reason he dared not show himself in too much of a hurry; his appearance was suspicious enough in all conscience, without that additional touch. He thrust hands in his pockets and sauntered, with a well-assumed but perhaps not totally convincing air of nonchalance toward the limb of the law.

The latter faced the street, and remained all unsuspecting of O'Rourke's approach until—and the mischief of it was that O'Rourke was still a full five yards the wrong side of the man—Hole himself jumped to the end of the quay and sent a yell echoing after the fugitive.

"Hey!" he roared. "Stop 'im! Deserter! Thief! Stop thief!"

The black faced about in an instant, but before the meaning of the captain's words could filter through his wool and penetrate his cranium, O'Rourke was upon him and had put an elbow smartly into his midriff in passing, all but toppling the man backward into the shallows.

It had been well for him had he suc-

ceeded. As it was, the fellow saved himself by a hair's breadth, and the next minute was after O'Rourke, yelling madly.

The Irishman showed a pair of fleet heels. But surely the devil himself was in the luck that night. Who shall describe in what manner a rabble springs out of the very cobbles of Alexandria's streets? Men, women, naked children, and yapping pariah dogs; fellahs, Arabs, Bedouins from the desert, Nubians, Greeks, Levantines—the fugitive had not covered twoscore yards ere a mob was snapping at his calves.

O'Rourke turned and twisted, dodged and doubled, smote this gratuitous enemy full in the face, treated that one as he had the policeman (and left both howling), and seized upon the first opening to swing into a narrow back way, leading inland from the waterfront—a passage black as an Egyptian night and full of unexpected pitfalls and obstacles. And the man-pack streamed after him, shrieking the news ahead and complimenting their quarry in a dozen tongues and a hundred dialects.

You may be sure he ran as never he had run before, straining and laboring, stumbling, recovering, plunging onward. And, by the gods, wasn't it hot! The khamsin raved and tore like a spirit of fire through that narrow alley, and turned it into a miniature inferno.

Through this unsavory and sweltering hole O'Rourke panted on, his temples throbbing, his heart hammering in his breast like a piece of clockwork gone mad, sweat pouring from him in showers—to such an alarming extent, he says, that he was persuaded that the ultimate outcome of it all would be a pool of water on the cobbles—the visible remains of him who had been Terence O'Rourke.

But, in the course of some minutes, the end of the tunnel came in view; a lighted rift between house walls, giving upon the illuminated street beyond. The sight evoked a fresh burst of speed from O'Rourke. He dashed madly out of the alley, stumbled, and ran head-

long into a strolling Greek, who grappled with him, at first in surprise, then in resentment, while the clamor of the pursuing rabble shrilled loud and near, and ever nearer.

Exhausted as he was, the Irishman struggled with little skill, before he mastered his own surprise, and in the end saw his finis written clear upon the blade of a thin, keen knife which the Greek had whipped from the folds of his garments and raised threateningly above the Irishman's head.

It was falling as he saw it. In another breath he had been stabbed. The unexpected intervened.

The Greek shrieked, dropped the knife as though it had suddenly turned white-hot in his hands, and leaped back from O'Rourke, nursing a broken wrist, while a voice as sweet as the singing of angels rang in the fugitive's ears; though the spirit of its melody was simple and crude enough.

"O'Rourke, be all th' powers! The masther himself! Glory! ye beggar, 'tis sorry I am that I didn't split the ugly face of ye wid me sthick! This way, yer honor! Come wid me!"

Blindly enough—indeed, the world was all a-whirl about him—O'Rourke felt his arm grasped in a strong and confident hand, and permitted himself to be swung to the right and across the street. In a thought, blackness again was all around him, but the hand was still on his arm and hurrying him on, and he yielded himself to its guidance, without power to question or to object; what breath he had he sorely needed.

With his new-found ally, he stumbled onward, perhaps a hundred yards, the voice of the rabble making night hideous behind them. Hardly, indeed, had the two whipped into the mouth of the back way ere it was choked by a mass of pursuers. But—"Niver fear!" said the voice at his side. "'Tis ourselves that'll outwit them. Here, now, yer honor, do ye go straight on widout sthoppin' ontill ye come to the iron dure in th' dead wall. Knock wance, count tin, an' knock again. I'll lead thim away and be wid ye again in a brace av shakes!"

Benumbed by fatigue and exhaustion, O'Rourke obeyed. He was aware that his preserver had turned aside into a cross-alley, but hardly of more. Mechanically he blundered on in the darkness until, as he had been advised, he was brought up by a wall that made a cul-de-sac of the way.

With trembling hands, he felt before him, his fingers touching the smooth, cool surface of a sheet of metal. This, then, was the door. As carefully as he could he knocked, counted ten, and knocked again—while the mob that had lusted for his blood trailed off down the side alley in frantic pursuit of his generous preserver. And he heard, with a smile, the latter's wild and defiant Irish yell that lured them onward, on the false scent.

"If 'tis not Danny," whispered the adventurer, "then 'tis myself is not the O'Rourke! Bless the lad!"

But as he breathed this benediction, the iron door swung inward, and he stumbled across the threshold, half-fainting.

He was, in truth, hardly conscious that he had done more than pass from the open night to the night of an enclosed space. His foot caught on some obstruction, and he went to his knees with a cry that was a cross between a sob and a gasp; and incontinently fell at full length upon the earthen floor, his head pillowed on his arm, panting as if his heart would break.

In the darkness above him some one cried aloud, a startled cry, and then the door was thrust to with a clang and a rattle of bolts. A match scratched loudly and a flicker of light leaped from the wick of a small hand-lamp, and revealed to its holder the fagged and quivering figure on the floor.

Some one sat down beside him, with a low exclamation of solicitude, and gathered his head into her lap. Some one quite simply enfolded his neck with her soft arms and pressed his head to her bosom, and on the top of that kissed him full and long upon the brow. And—

"My dear! My dear!" she murmured, in French. "What has hap-

pened, oh, what has happened? My poor, poor boy!"

Now, the integral madness of all this was as effectual in restoring O'Rourke to a partial consciousness as had been a douche of cold water in the face. He told himself that he was dreaming. And yet, when he opened his eyes, it was to see, dimly illuminated by the feeble glimmer of the lamp, the face of a woman as beautiful as young.

One glance was enough. O'Rourke shut his eyes again. "If I look too long," he assured himself earnestly, "she'll vanish or—or turn into a fiend. Sure, 'tis a judgment on me. Too long have I been an amorous dram-drinker; this will undoubtedly be the delirium tremens of love!"

And with that he slipped quietly into temporary unconsciousness.

IV.

When he opened his eyes again, his head was resting on the cool, damp floor, and the girl was gone, even as he had told himself she would be. But a moment later he assured himself that that part of his adventure had been no hallucination, after all, for he caught sight of a feminine figure standing a little to one side and looking down upon him, her face now so shadowed that he could gather naught of her expression, whether of displeasure or of perplexity. From her attitude, however, he assumed that she had suddenly discovered herself to be lavishing endearments on the wrong man, and that she was not utterly delighted with the situation.

Such a state of mind, indeed, he considered natural enough; and being now recovered, to some extent at least, he saw no profit in making her suffer more. With a simulation of faintness that was not wholly assumed, he rolled his head to one side, opened wide his eyes, and looked her full in the face, inquiring (you can imagine the faint, thinned brogue of him): "Where am I?"

The girl gave a sudden movement,

and her face darkened. "You are not Danny!" she declared. "Who are you?"

"Oho!" said O'Rourke to himself. "That's the explanation, is it?" He sat up, embracing his knees and making a rueful face. "Faith, me dear," he admitted aloud, "I believe every word ye say. I am not Danny."

Again she started with impatience. "Then how did you get here? How know the signal?"

"Sure, because 'twas Danny himself and no other that showed me the way and told me how to knock, and—let me think one moment." He passed his hand over his eyes, as if in an effort to concentrate his mind. "And then," he announced dreamily, "the door opened, and I fell in, somehow—I can't say how—and 'twas all dark after that. Have I been here long, now?"

"You don't remember what happened after you came in, monsieur?" she demanded, with a lightening face.

"Not the least in the world. What was it?"

But she countered that embarrassing question neatly, evidently relieved of her fears that O'Rourke had been aware of her mistake. Which was precisely as he had wished it to be.

"Only a moment or two," she said, still employing the French tongue and speaking it, in truth, very prettily, with a charming little accent. "I think you fainted. Then—then you know Danny Mahone?"

"None better, me dear. I've known him since he was so high." And O'Rourke indicated a height of some three inches from the ground.

"And he—he sent you here?"

"Who else?" a trace impatiently. "How else would I know the signal? There was a bit of trouble down the street, and me in the middle of it, and getting the worst of it, if ye must know, when along comes Danny and lends a hand and whips me off to here, and says he'll be back in a moment. He'll tell ye the details himself, but I"—he eyed her quizzically—"would now ask ye to overlook the unceremonious manner of me entrance and a certain lack of dignity as to me attire, which I'll

ask ye to believe is not me ordinary evening-dress, and—and, faith, me throat is baked dry entirely. May I beg a drink at mademoiselle's fair hands?"

He was on his feet now, and enjoying the situation hugely. "And 'tis an Irish eye for beauty Danny has!" he told himself. "I admire his taste."

For the girl was exceedingly fair to see; slender and straight, and girlish and sweet; a daughter of the Greeks, if he were to judge of her features and her dress. In that odd light, with perturbation in her pose, and half a smile trembling on her lips, because of O'Rourke's conceit, and half a shadow of worry clouding her eyes, she made a pretty picture indeed.

She was quick to grant his request. "Danny will explain," she murmured. "This way, if you please, monsieur, and"—as they passed through the doorway—"if you will wait here one moment, I will fetch wine."

"Bless your heart!" murmured O'Rourke, eying her retreating figure.

He found himself in a small courtyard, walled about on all sides by the living-rooms and galleries of a house, whose type you who know your Egypt will recognize; a two-storied building with a gallery running around the second story, to which stairs lead from the court and from which access may be had to the sleeping-rooms. At the time, with the exception of one room on the ground floor, all were without light.

In the center of the court was a little fountain—a stone basin with a central upright from which a spray of water tinkled down into the pool beneath. Above arched the sky with its low, hot stars, and over the roof the khamsin roared; but in the courtyard there was peace and quiet enough to make a weary man sink down upon a bench and clasp his head in his hands and wonder if the events of the past three hours were not, after all, but a nightmare. As O'Rourke did.

But they were true enough, and the truth of his sufferings and his loss came home to him, even as the girl advanced

from the shadows beneath the gallery and brought him a little earthenware jug, brimming with wine.

He accepted it, with a bow. "Made-moiselle is as good as she is beautiful!" And watched her blush, with the appreciation of a connoisseur, as he drained the jug to its last drop, and felt the generous fluid grapple with his fatigue, and temper it and send new strength leaping in his veins.

"Ah!" he sighed, resuming his seat upon the bench; and was about to put a question of some moment, when a second summons clanged upon the iron door and sent the girl flying toward the rear of the house.

"That will be Danny now," O'Rourke opined, as she swept past him.

She murmured a response he did not clearly catch. "What's that?" he called after her.

"Or, possibly"—pausing at the entrance to the rear chamber—"it may be Monsieur the Captain Hole!"

"The divvle!" cried O'Rourke, and was on his feet in a twinkling, casting about him for a weapon. "That can't be——"

Nothing offered itself to his hand suitable for a weapon either of offense or defense, save and except the bench he had been occupying; and the Irishman was just bending to seize this, with a definite intention of hurling it at Captain Hole's head, when the entrance of quite another person relieved him of the necessity of fighting.

It was Danny, plainly enough; Danny, the same as of old, with his half-sheepish, half-impudent grin and his shock of flaming hair, his upper lip that was long even for an Irish boy's, his roving and twinkling blue eyes, his tip-tilted nose, his short, sturdy physique.

"Faith," said O'Rourke, "the gods are not so unkind, after all! 'Tis as welcome as a letter from home, the sight of ye, Danny!" And, "Danny!" he observed, with some severity, "I'll ask ye to explain what the divvle at all ye're doing here!"

Danny's assurance deserted him on

the instant. He had done his former master a signal service that night, but nothing more, in his estimation, than was due the O'Rourke. Whatever he felt, he looked to perfection a boy caught at mischief—hanging his head and eying O'Rourke under his brows, shamefaced.

"Aw," he deprecated, "sure, now, yer honor, now——"

"Danny," demanded O'Rourke sternly, "does Miss Cleopatra here understand English?"

"Divvle a word," the ex-valet protested earnestly. "Beyond Greek and Frinch and Arabic, sure, she's ignorant as Paddy's pig!"

So much was plainly evident from the girl's manner and her expression of puzzlement. Reassured, O'Rourke proceeded:

"'Tis good hearing. Faith, if she understood the king's English, 'tis me hair she would be tearing out be the roots in one minute. Danny, I gather that the lady is be way of liking ye more than ye deserve. Is it in love with you she is?"

Danny stole a sidelong glance at the girl. "Beggin' yer honor's pardon," he stammered, "an' I belave she is that."

"Umm!" snorted O'Rourke. "And what, if ye please, about poor Annie Bragin, at home? Is it marrying a Greek ye would be, and leaving poor Annie to cry her eyes out for ye, worthless scut that ye are?"

"Divvle a bit, respects to yer honor! Sure, 'tis only for amusement——"

"And who may she be, that ye make so free to amuse yourself with?"

"The daughter av the man I'm work-in' for, yer honor, Noccovie, the Greek tobaccy merchant."

"And is this his house, then?"

"No, sir, but a—a sort av a shore-house, in a way of speaking. It's jist 'round th' corner they do be livin', in a grand, foine house, sir."

"Then, what is the young lady doing here?"

"Waitin' for me to take her place, sir. Misther Noccovie is away, and—and,"

in a blurted confession, "'tis a bit of hashish-smuggling he does on the side. The stuff is always brought here, sor, an' to-night's the night a consignment's due."

"Ah!" observed O'Rourke darkly. And caught his breath. One by one, it seemed, he was gathering the trumps into his hand. He turned to the boy again.

"Danny, is this the way a decent man should be behaving himself?" he thundered. "Is it your mother's son and the sweetheart of Annie Bragin that's become no more than a breaker of hearts? Danny, Danny, what would Father Malachi be saying if he could hear what ye've just told me? When, sir, did ye confess last?"

Danny cowered. "Aw, dear!" he whimpered. "Aw, dearie-dear! An' meself meant no harm at all!"

"Thin send your light-o'-love home at once, Danny, and come back to me without pause. And—Danny!"

"Yiss, yer honor. I'll do so, yer honor. But will yerself hark for the signal at the door and let Cap'n Hole in?"

It was true, then!

"I will. But see that ye bring me back a change of clothes, Danny, and don't linger long over your fond farewells with the lady, if ye're not looking for a hiding. And—Danny!"

"Yiss, sor?"

"Have ye a revolver?"

"Here 'tis, sor."

"Give it here, and bring another back with ye. Be quick, now!"

Alone, O'Rourke seated himself on the edge of the fountain and considered gravely the uncertainties of life. "'Tis fate," he concluded soberly, at length. "And 'tis hard upon eleven now. They will not dare run that cargo before midnight, and—'tis meself that sorely needs a bath."

Deliberately he stripped off the rags and tatters that were his souvenirs of the voyage on the *Pelican*, and plunged into the fountain. Danny was back with the promised wearing-apparel ere he had finished splashing.

V.

At midnight the muezzin in a neighboring minaret turned his face to the wind-swept sky and called the faithful to prayers and meditation. The musical melancholy of his wail had scarce been drowned by the khamsin's mighty voice, ere Danny started to his feet.

"They'll be coming now, yer honor," he said excitedly. His quick ear had caught the sound of footsteps in the alley.

O'Rourke arose to follow him. "And I can count on ye, Danny?"

"To the last breath in me body, sor!"

"And I will take ye with me, on to Burma?"

"Sure, an' does yer honor think that I could sleep of nights, sor, after hearin' all ye've been through so far, an' suspectin' what ye must go through? Take me wid ye, is ut? Faith, I'll go!"

For the third time that night the signal sounded upon the metal door. Danny and O'Rourke disappeared into the darkness of the little room, carrying no light. The servant went directly to the door, opened it an inch, and peered out.

"Whisht! Is ut yersilves?"

Hole's voice answered him. "Let us in, you darned Mick!"

The darkness cloaked Danny's vindictive grin as he opened wide the door. The two cloaked figures stooped low to enter, and passed through the room to the courtyard, staggering beneath their burdens, breathing hard and swearing harder. Danny followed them openly, O'Rourke slipping out the last and keeping himself, for the time being, in the shadow of the gallery.

Hole dumped his burden down upon the bench and turned to Danny. "Where's your master?" he demanded, evidently in as ugly mood as he could muster. "Don't stand there starin', you——"

"That will be about enough," suggested O'Rourke pleasantly, in a conversational tone, stepping from his place of concealment. "Don't call names, Hole—ye're too near your God—if ye own one, which I misdoubt."

In the clear, bright starlight the pistols in his hands were plainly evident; and one covered the head of the captain, one that of the *Pelican's* first-officer.

"Ye will not move," said O'Rourke sharply, "save and except to put your hands above your heads. So—don't delay, Mr. Dennison. I've never known me temper to be shorter."

Hole began to splutter excitedly. But, "Save your breath, ye whelp!" O'Rourke counseled him curtly. "Ye'll have need of it before I'm done with ye." He added: "Search and disarm them, Danny."

The servant set about his task with alacrity; it is safe to say that he left not so much as a match in the pocket of either. While he was about it, Hole, with his eyes steadily fixed upon the unwavering muzzles of O'Rourke's revolvers, managed to master his emotion enough to ask coherently:

"What are you goin' to do with us?"

"You'll see in good time," returned O'Rourke grimly. "Have you found it, Danny?"

Danny backed away from Hole, whom he had searched after Dennison. "Yiss, sor," he returned. "At least, I think so. Is this it?"

"I can't look at the moment, Danny. Is it a leather bag with something hard inside, size of a hen's egg, or a bit larger?"

"The very same, yer honor."

"Very well." O'Rourke suppressed the tremble of exultation in his voice, for the nonce. "Put it in your pocket, Danny—the very bottom of your pocket. Did you get a gun from either of them?"

"One from each, sor?"

"Loaded?"

"Yiss, sor."

"Then cover them, Danny."

For himself, O'Rourke put down his pistols and calmly stripped off his coat, rolling up his sleeves.

"Hole," he said tersely, "don't move. If ye do, Danny will puncture ye. Your turn comes last. Dennison, ye may step out."

"What for?" demanded the Scot, advancing.

"To receive payment, with interest, for that blow ye gave me this evening, me man. Put up your hands. I'm going, in your own words, Mr. Dennison, to hammer the fear of God into as cowardly and despicable a pair of scoundrels as ever I've encountered. And," reflectively, "I've met a good many. But the rest were men."

VI.

Twenty minutes later two battered and sore sailor men were sitting back to back, their arms lashed to one another and to the central upright so that neither could move, up to their chins in the basin of the fountain of Noccovie, the Greek.

"Ye will find the bath quite refreshing," O'Rourke had told them, as he was preparing to depart, "as well as a novel experience. 'Twill do ye a world of good, Captain Hole, as any one will tell you who has ever had the misfortune to stand to leeward of ye aboard the *Pelican*."

"Ye will find your money and other belongings on the bench, here, if ever ye are loosed, which I doubt. I call your attention to the fact that I take nothing but me property, of which ye sought to rob me. On the other hand, because of that attempted robbery, I hereby refuse to pay me bill for passage from Athens to Alexandria. If ye care to dispute it, me solicitors in Ireland will be pleased to enter into litigation with ye. *Gentlemen*," he concluded, and he bowed ironically, "I bid ye good night."

He was still chuckling over the experience when, twenty minutes later, he and Danny were trudging through the silent streets of Alexandria, a full mile away, on their way to Danny's lodgings. One of his lips was badly cut and swollen, and he was sore and bruised from head to foot; but in his trousers pocket the Pool of Flame was a comfortable bulge; and about his lips wreathed a smile of ineffable self-satisfaction.

The Benefactor and the Bumps

By William Hamilton Osborne

Author of "The White-hot Gridiron of Remorse," Etc.

It isn't fair to laugh when the good people of a town like Flatbrookville get together to think up a plan for ridding the place of one of the ten modern plagues; but you have to laugh, just the same, when Mr. Osborne tells the story. He invests it with a humor that is not to be resisted



It was midnight. It was moonlight. On the main road leading, as all motor-cars know it, from New York to Port Jervis, there stood a group of men. These men were clustered together just upon the outskirts of Flatbrookville. They spoke in low tones. Upon their faces in the uncertain light there appeared determination of purpose. They were there to do. Some of these men bore picks; some bore spades; one of them was seated on a wagon-load of dirt. They were Flatbrookvillers, every one.

John Henry Smiley was the first to speak. He was a well-known Flatbrookviller, a deacon in the church.

"It kind o' looks to me," he ventured, "as though we'd ought to brought the dominie along, and opened this here thing with prayer."

Uncle Billy Andrews nodded. "You're right," he whispered; "it's got all the marks of the layin' of a corner-stone, and it'll do a blame sight more good. I move," he said, "that Peter J. Williamson throws on the first shovelful of dirt."

"Second the motion," growled Deacon Smiley. "Peter J. Williamson, come forward and do the duty that awaits you. It's just like a lodge-meetin'," he assured himself.

"Pete Williamson ain't here," exclaimed a voice. "He's gone to Coney Island with the Epworth League from Monroe."

"Ain't here!" echoed Uncle Billy. "Do you mean to say that he's left us when this here important move was goin' on; when this town of Flatbrookville was goin' to shake off its shoulders the terror that was settlin' down around about it? Do you mean——"

But he was interrupted. Sturt Ingersoll, the man on the wagon, whipped up his horses and drove them into the group of men in the middle of the road.

"We don't mean nothin'," exclaimed Sturt, "except that if we're going to do this thing, we've got to do it. It ain't one, it's two that we've got to build to-night. Here's the first shovelful. Look out."

He jerked a chain. The first shovelful was a wagonful. He had dumped it directly across the road. "Come on, boys," he cried cheerily. And then they fell to work. They dug dirt from the roadside, plying pick, crowbar, and shovel; loaded it into the wagon, carted it to the first load, and dumped it. This operation they repeated perhaps fifty times. Then, from a pile of crushed stone that had been lying for a week, ready mixed with binder, at one side of the road, they sprinkled their midnight job, inches thick.

"And, by George, that's done!" cried the deacon.

"Now," yelled Ingersoll, "for the other side of town. Come on."

The dawn was breaking when the Flatbrookvillers crawled back to their homes.

"There's people'll do some tall think-

in' to-morrow," ventured Uncle Billy Andrews. "Wait till the sun's up! Wait till the wheels of the world gets greased and is goin' smooth! Wait till the swells get out and hums along from Manhattan Borough to Delaware Water Gap! Wait till they gets to what we've built to-night!"

"There ought to be a name for 'em, it seems to me," suggested Sturt Ingersoll. Uncle Billy Andrews was not feased.

"There is," he said; "they're the Anti-Auto Bumps of Flatbrookville. They're the bumps of progress. The phrenologist of the macadam roads can rub his hand over the world, and when he comes to them there bumps he'll say: 'There they are; they stand for decency; they stand for progress; they're up to date; they're the bumps of Flatbrookville.'"

"I wonder," quoth the deacon, "what Frankfort Plains'll think about 'em, anyhow."

Frankfort Plains was a small village, half the size of Flatbrookville, ten miles away; poor, meek, gentle, ragged; overshadowed by the greatness of Flatbrookville, her neighbor. In the minds of the Flatbrookvillers, the inhabitants of Frankfort Plains were ever holding up their hands in holy admiration at the worth and works of Flatbrookville. Frankfort Plains would never in the world have thought of anti-auto bumps. Her cows, chickens, dogs, men, women, horses, and wagons were run into and run over fifty times a year, and all that poor, little, inoffensive Frankfort Plains could do was to get its constable out to look up and down the road, after an offending car was completely out of sight.

Flatbrookville patronized Frankfort Plains; flaunted its men, its genius, its talents, its very moderate supply of wealth in the face of Frankfort Plains, as a young princess of the blood might flaunt her garments in the face of a beggar-maid. But upon this occasion Uncle Billy Andrews felt that the opinion of Frankfort Plains, though usually cherished, because invariably favorable, was of little moment.

"Frankfort Plains!" he snorted. "Who cares what it thinks? What'll New York think?" He paused a moment, and lowered his voice. "What'll Paris think?" he whispered. "She'll hear about 'em; them there anti-auto bumps. What'll the world think, eh?"

That morning the sun rose upon a strange sight. Beaming genially across at Flatbrookville, its rays lighted upon two huge mounds, one at each end of the limits of the village, shaped and fashioned so as to run across the turn-pike. In times past, the minutemen of Flatbrookville had thrown up just such earthworks against the British red-coats—the common foe. Now Flatbrookville had fortified itself against another foe—full speed.

These bumps were ingeniously constructed. To the eye of one who approached from along the road they were not formidable; they were not intended to seem formidable in the least. To the car which kept within the legal speed of twenty miles an hour they were as harmless in fact as they were in appearance. A gentle jolt, a tremor of the springs, and that was all. But to the scorcher they were indeed pitfalls, if a bump can ever be a pit; inverted pitfalls they were, at any rate.

The next morning all Flatbrookville was out upon the pike. Half the populace stood within safe distance of one bump, at one end of town; half at the other bump, at the other end. The auto traffic was about evenly divided. As all the automobilists came from New York, they had to get back again, and there were as many returning as there were going. But upon that morning, those Flatbrookvillers who stood at the outward-bound bump were favored.

Five miles down the road toward Manhattan Borough a road machine was forging ahead at a furious clip. It was a Mercedes, going at the top of its bent. Its driver was a man who invariably ate up the miles before him, much as a fish gobbles up a worm. But for the fish there sometimes is a hook; and for the driver of the Mercedes the level macadam was but luscious bait

at the end of which lurked battle, murder, sudden death.

The Mercedes reached the bump in no time. The bump was ready. It reached out for the Mercedes, grasped it, tossed it like a flapjack into the air, dashed it to one side, and then to the other, and then—sank back into the road and let the Mercedes do the rest.

"By thunderation!" yelled the Flatbrookvillers profanely. And then suddenly they grasped the real utility; the real progressiveness of the bumps.

"By gum, it's good for trade!" they cried. It was. Before the Mercedes and its driver had completely recovered from the shock, the worthy venders of labor, skill, and supplies in Flatbrookville had felt the wonderful impetus of the accident. Trade boomed in the exact ratio as the Mercedes had gone, clawing, into the air.

There was the doctor—that follows as a matter of course. He was called at once. It was Doc Ferguson.

"Compound fractures," he muttered, rubbing his chin; "contusions, lesions, cuts, bruises, dislocations, disability—dollars."

"Dollars." Such was the keynote. The bumps had not only been safe investments; they were actually paying breakneck dividends. For there was the blacksmith, conjoined with the machine-shop. There was the tailor; there was— Well, for goodness' sake, there isn't anything that a man doesn't need after being held up by a bump! The Flatbrookvillers had held him up in true style, for they were taking his money—all he had. Even the hotel had to board and lodge him—for a consideration.

"It keeps a man busy just making cocktails for him," said Racket, the host of the Flatbrookville Hotel, with a good-humored grin upon his countenance; "and we're getting New York prices from him, you bet, too. Dollar and a half a day, not a cent less. Yep. That's right."

And so it went. The Mercedes man was only one. It was the busy season for motorists: the fall; and many—fell. The bumps were no respecters of

persons; the great and the small they welcomed, provided they were only—fast.

Frankfort Plains did sit up and look surprised, as the deacon had prophesied. So did the world. At least the New York newspapers took notice. Flatbrookville was lifted for the nonce out of the small type of obscurity into the scarehead of editorial comment. And it was prospering. The doctor's income in Flatbrookville had leaped suddenly up to an average of fifteen dollars a week, and the others were following in his train. The bumps had made things hum.

Peter J. Williamson is a man who was mentioned at the commencement of this fragmentary history. He is the citizen who was not present on the occasion of the building of the bumps; it was he who had preferred Dreamland to the dumping of dirt; and Luna Park to the lunar lump building of Flatbrookville. He did not return until after the accident to the Mercedes; and when he did return, there was a rush on the part of the deacon, and of Uncle Billy and of Sturt Ingersoll, to tell him all about it. Peter J. Williamson listened unconcernedly. He drew forth a toothpick and began to chew it.

"Got it at the Astor House," he explained. The ambition of every Flatbrookviller is to stand on the Astor House steps in Manhattan Borough and pick his teeth for all the world to see.

"What do you think of it?" they queried, after their recital.

"Of—the Astor House?" he answered. They snorted excitedly.

"Of the—bumps," they yelled.

"Pretty good," he conceded, in a patronizing tone of voice.

They turned away. "You're sore," they told him, "because you didn't take no part in it." They felt elated, after all, that Pete Williamson had not been there.

But Williamson smiled mysteriously. "Any important news since I've been gone?" he asked grandiloquently.

It made them snort once more. Will-

Williamson threw the toothpick away, thrust his hands into his pocket, and leaned against a tree. He screwed up his face into a multitude of wrinkles.

"Any of you remember a feller of the name of Carnaby?" he asked. He asked it carelessly, as though it were of no moment whatsoever. They shook their heads thoughtfully.

"Charity boy from the poorhouse," he went on, "twenty-five years ago. He wasn't no good. Plummer used him in the hotel stables. Kind of a simpleton, the boy was; always mooning about. Never could do anything with his hands. They called him Handy Carnaby, just for fun—because he wasn't handy, don't you see? Remember?"

The deacon brightened up. "I remember," he chimed in; "low-down, cadaverous lunkhead—Carnaby. Freckles. Big feet. I remember, all right."

Peter J. Williamson shifted his position. "I wouldn't go for to say about the freckles or the feet, or the low-down; or the cadaverous, or the lunkhead," he replied; "at least, not now."

He stopped and whistled part of a tune. As they seemed to expect that he would proceed, he stopped the tune and went on.

"Met him yesterday," said Williamson, "on Broadway. Hasn't changed a bit. Handsome, just as he always was. Fine as silk. Talked to me like a brother."

"One of them there 'white-wings' street-sweepers, I imagine," grinned the deacon.

Peter J. Williamson nodded in an offhand sort of way, spat as far into the road as was compatible with dignity, and laughed.

"You're not far wrong," he drawled. Then he straightened up, took his hands out of his pockets, and smote one palm with the other fist.

"He's worth five million and a half!" he said. He might as well have propelled a bomb into their midst.

"N-no!" gasped the deacon. "What! Handy Carnaby! Come off."

"Prove it," said Uncle Billy belligerently.

But Williamson merely slumped back against the tree again. "I don't have to prove it," he replied, "because he's coming down here to see you all. He'll prove it to you, all right, all right."

"How?" queried the deacon. "Clothes don't go for to make the man, you know."

Williamson laughed. "It's money that talks," he answered. "Carnaby's got money, and you'll know it soon enough." Once more he opposed that fist unto that palm.

"Flatbrookville," he blurted, "is to get a quarter of a million of it right away."

When the smoke had cleared after this volley, Peter J. Williamson turned to Uncle Billy.

"Didn't somebody say somethin' about bumps?" he queried.

He was right. He had them floored. What were a couple of small dividend-bearing bumps to news like this? And it was all true. Down in the borough of Manhattan millionaire Carnaby's private secretary turned to that gentleman of wealth.

"Are you really going to put up for Flatbrookville to the tune of a quarter of a million?" he inquired.

The millionaire nodded. "I am," he replied. "I've thought about it for a good long while, and when I met this chap Williamson the other day, I made up my mind to do it right away."

"What's Flatbrookville to you?" queried the private secretary, with the ease and familiarity of any man who sat in the presence of the genial millionaire.

"I'll tell you," said Carnaby. "I was born there, and I lived there until I was almost grown up. I haven't pleasant recollections of the place. The people who didn't cuff me laughed at me. They called me a lazy hound. And all because they didn't understand I was working; but it was with my brain instead of my hands. It was a good thing I got away from there; it wasn't long before I had other people's hands and other people's money working for me, as well as my own money,

too, and—then there was Oatemy, my breakfast-food, and then—Wall Street; and the rest you know. Flatbrookville is the only Jersey place I know, except one other—that was Frankfort Plains, just the other side of the Ville. And that place I remember with some pleasure. When I left the Ville, I passed through the Plains, and an old farmer's wife there gave me a good meal and a good blessing, and a good bed, and some good free advice. I've never forgotten the advice or her, or Frankfort Plains. I can't remember any good of Flatbrookville, except that I was picked out of there, as you may say."

"Well," ventured the private secretary, "why don't you give something to Frankfort Plains instead?"

But Carnaby the millionaire only shook his head. "Flatbrookville was—home," he answered. "Don't you see?"

The information dispensed by Peter J. Williamson soon spread itself thickly about the village. Most of the people shook their heads, and wondered how long it would take Pete Williamson to sober up. But some believed, and their faith was justified, for within a week Carnaby the millionaire, per his private secretary, wrote a formal letter in which he hinted that he would like to do the proper thing for Flatbrookville. Before committing himself entirely, he asked that a committee of the townsfolk send him a list of the buildings and improvements that the town most needed. The committee got together at once.

"What's the first thing?" asked Williamson, who was the chairman of the committee.

"I suppose," ventured Uncle Billy, "that he'll want us to mention a library, at the least, so we'd better put that in first."

"A new church," suggested the dominie.

"A town hall," remarked the deacon.

"An opera-house," commented Williamson, who had wished that Luna Park and Dreamland were somewhat nearer home; "and funds for a village band, and——"

But there was no difficulty about ma-

king up the list. When completed, the Flatbrookville on paper would have been—as many other towns on paper are—a fitting rival for the Oranges, or Plainfield, or Montclair. A quarter of a billion would have done them very well!

"If you don't ask, you won't get," said Flatbrookville.

And Carnaby the millionaire wrote to Flatbrookville:

I'll come down some day and look things over, and see all my old dear friends who gave me my first start in life.

This was a genteel way of paying all Flatbrookville a compliment, for every man, every woman in the place of sufficient age and residence could remember with distinctness the acts of kindness done by him or her to young Carnaby, the model of industry and enterprise, so many years ago.

"We cast our bread upon the waters," said Flatbrookville, "when we helped young Carnaby; and it is returning to us again—with compound interest," they told each other in a whisper.

On behalf of the village, Peter J. Williamson wrote back that the Flatbrookvillers were waiting for him, and would welcome him with open arms.

"There are two trains a day," wrote Williamson to the millionaire; "one in the morning, and one in the afternoon. When you come tell us which you'll take."

"We'll have ten trains a day soon," Williamson whispered to his colleagues; "for Carnaby's a director on the road. Watch out."

Drawing short and excited breaths, Flatbrookville set its face toward the coming event. Streets and roads were cleaned; houses were painted; barns spruced up; fences whitewashed.

"Though," Williamson told them, "we don't want to spruce up too much, or he won't see what we need."

So they fixed up just enough; no more. And they were just about ready for the rich man, when he announced, through the mail, that he was ready to come to them.

He wrote to Williamson. "I shall reach you in the afternoon," his letter said.

The day fixed was but a week away. The week dwindled to nothing, and the sun rose upon the day when the millionaire of Manhattan was to visit Flatbrookville. The village took hold of something, and drew a long breath and waited. The train was due at three-fifty-two. At three almost every man, woman, and child was at the station. A volunteer choir, and a nondescript village band, and the fire department were out in force. The Flatbrookville funeral-coach was out in force, too, for the purpose of conveying the benefactor up to the town hall, to the hotel, to the church, or wherever he might desire to go.

Three-fifty-two arrived. Of course the train did not, as the three-fifty-two was never supposed to pull into the station until about twenty minutes after four. But, for once, she pulled in at four to the dot.

Williamson laughed. "Makes a big difference whether she carries a director of the road or not," he said.

The crowd waited until the train came to a standstill, and then broke into a wild huzza.

"Hooray—hooray!" yelled the multitude.

"Hi-hi! Ki-ki! Fie-fie! Flatbrookville!" cried the fire department.

And then: "All aboard," cried the conductor, and the train pulled out again.

The millionaire was not upon the train. That appalling fact sank slowly into the minds of the Flatbrookvillers.

"Maybe he didn't know this was the place," some of them cried. But they knew better, for they had looked into all the windows; and the more venturesome had climbed upon the platforms and looked into every coach. And Carnaby—was not.

Sadly they went back into the center of the town. Little knots of people stood dejectedly about the streets discussing the matter.

"He'll wire, or write, don't fear," said Williamson. But even his hopes

had been shattered. This looked ominous.

Suddenly there was a commotion at one end of town. One man, two men, ran half-way up the street, yelling hoarsely, and started back again.

"Come on," they cried; "there's some fun down here. Don't stand around there. Come out and see the fun."

"What fun?" yelled Williamson. The reply was unintelligible. But the crowd ran; and he ran with it. When he reached the outskirts of the town he snorted.

"Nothing but those blamed bumps," he said disgustedly. "What of it? They're an old story by this time."

However, he kept on, on the outskirts of the crowd. The Flatbrookvillers were excited. The doctor tripped down the road at a double-quick gait.

"It's—another Mercedes!" yelled the crowd. "The bumps has got him."

They pressed closer. The deacon was among them. "It's not a Mercedes," he replied; "it's one of them new Mastodons—the latest out. We've been waiting to catch one. And now we've caught it."

He was right. The car was the largest that the Flatbrookvillers had ever seen. Those who had seen it come said that its speed held the Flatbrook record.

"Greased lightning," they remarked. It had come along with undiminished vigor, and had struck the South Bump like a thirteen-inch shot glancing from the side of a battle-ship. It had turned completely over, and all that could be heard from its former occupant were groans—and a few feeble swear words on the side.

The men of the village got to work. Work of this kind was very profitable. Inside of ten minutes they had turned the car over. Its owner lay writhing on the road.

"There he is," cried the deacon; "practically a murderer, who has been brought to his senses in the eleventh hour by our bumps."

Peter J. Williamson, for want of something better to do, pressed in toward the front.

"What's he?" he asked indifferently. "The forty-ninth or fiftieth that you've had?"

He did not wait for an answer, for he had seen the face of the owner of the car, and he had jumped into the air and had emitted a blood-curdling yell—all at the same instant.

"It's—it's—it's Carnaby!" he cried.

It was Carnaby the millionaire. He said he would come down in the afternoon. Well, he had come, with plans for the expenditure of a quarter of a million. He had come in his car. Carnaby the millionaire always traveled in his car.

Carnaby the millionaire slowly came to. He swore feebly again, and groaned loudly. He raised his head.

"I want to see what hit me?" he demanded. They didn't have to show him. He knew. He had heard of bumps before. He had never met one until now.

The doctor knelt beside him. "H'm," said the doctor professionally; "compound fractures, dislocations—dollars," he whispered to himself.

Millionaire Carnaby was taken into Flatbrookville. The royal apartment at the hotel was placed at his disposal. Everybody in the place did everything for him. He was there a month, at least.

"Just as soon as I am able, I must get back," he told the Flatbrookvillers. He made no reference to the quarter of a million. But during his convalescence, Peter J. Williamson took occasion to remind him of it.

"Humph," was all he had to say.

Finally he announced his intention of going. He started to put it into execution.

Just before his departure, they once more mentioned the little matter of the quarter million—but with no result. Then, as though at a given signal, the tradesmen, artificers, doctors, machinists, and mine host came forward with their respective bills. But he waved them all aside.

"Flatbrookville," he thundered, "will pay 'em all. If Flatbrookville won't, I'll make her. Understand?"

His repaired machine was brought around, and he was assisted into it. He drove it himself. When he reached the crossroads he stopped for an instant and looked about him.

"This road leads to New York," said a Flatbrookviller.

"I don't want to take the road to New York," snarled the millionaire; "I want to take the road to—Frankfort Plains. Show me the way to go."

Reluctantly they showed him; and he went, at sixty miles an hour.

No bump impeded his path. Flatbrookville had learned a lesson. She had wiped the bumps from the face of the earth.

"They don't discriminate, these bumps," Flatbrookville said sadly. "They ain't got no discretion."

A week later the trains stopped coming to Flatbrookville; Frankfort Plains now has ten trains a day. But, then, the town of Frankfort Plains has other things beside.

WHEN THE LODGER STRUCK

THE lodger's pet abomination was cats, and the cat that dared to show a tail on his horizon was usually sorry for it. Imagine, therefore, his feelings, when, returning one night after a week's absence, he became suddenly aware of a suspicious hump under the counterpane of his bed.

Gingerly he ventured forth a hand. Great Scott! it was warm; and, yes, he could have sworn it moved.

A cat, sure enough. He, seizing a handy baseball bat, and with the air of a rural amateur about to make a home run, whirled his weapon aloft for a mighty stroke, and struck.

Item in his next week's bill: One hot-water bottle, seventy-five cents.

The Man of Secrets

By William Le Queux

Author of "Secrets of the Foreign Office," "The Tickencote Treasure," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Burton Blair, an Englishman, dies worth several millions, and carries with him to the grave the secret of how he amassed his great wealth. He bequeaths the bulk of his fortune to his daughter Mabel. A small bag of wash-leather which Blair always carried with him and which was supposed to contain the secret of his wealth is bequeathed to Gilbert Greenwood, a man who had befriended Blair and his daughter in former days. The bag is missing, however, and this arouses suspicions of foul play. Attempts to get Scotland Yard to act in the matter are useless. An Italian named Melandrini, who is unknown to Mabel, is appointed by the testator as the girl's secretary. Greenwood and his chum, Reginald Seton, set themselves to solve the three problems: Was Burton Blair murdered? By whom was the bag containing the dead man's secret stolen? Why was the Italian appointed Mabel's secretary? Greenwood goes to Italy, where he meets Fra Antonio, a Capuchin lay brother and a friend of Blair's, who promises his aid in the quest for the lost satchet. Fra Antonio warns him against a one-eyed Englishman, Dick Dawson—known in Italy as the Ceco—and a girl, Dolly. Greenwood has his suspicions aroused and he employs a padrone, Babbo Carlini, to find out what he can of the Capuchin and of Melandrini and Dick Dawson.

CHAPTER XI.

WHICH EXPLAINS THE PERIL OF MABEL BLAIR.



FROM inquiries made by old Babbo next morning at the Cross of Malta it appeared quite plain that Mr. Richard Dawson, whoever he was, constantly visited Lucca, and always with the object of consulting the popular Capuchin brother.

Sometimes the one-eyed Englishman who spoke Italian so well would journey up to the monastery and remain there several hours, and at others Fra Antonio would come to the inn and there remain closeted in closest secrecy with the visitor.

The Ceco, so-called because of his defective vision, was apparently a man of means, for his tips to the waiters and maids were always generous, and when a guest, he and his daughter always ordered the best that could be procured. They came from Florence, the padrone thought, but of that he was not quite certain. The letters and tele-

grams he received securing rooms were despatched from various towns in both France and Italy, which seemed to show that they were constantly traveling.

That was all the information we could gather. The identity of the mysterious Paolo Melandrini was, as yet, unproven. My primary object in traveling to Italy was not accomplished, but I nevertheless felt satisfied that I had at last discovered two of poor Blair's most intimate and yet secret friends.

But why the secrecy? When I recollected how close had been our friendship, I felt surprised, and even a trifle annoyed, that he had concealed the existence of these men from me. Much as I regretted to think ill of a friend who was dead, I could not suppress a suspicion that his acquaintance with those men was part of his secret, and that this secret was a dishonorable one.

Soon after midday I crammed my things into my valise, and, impelled by a strong desire to return to safeguard the interests of Mabel Blair, left Lucca for London. Babbo traveled with me as far as Pisa, where we changed, he journeying back to Florence and I pick-

ing up the night express on its way through from Rome to Calais.

While standing on the platform at Pisa, however, the shabby old man, who had grown thoughtful during the past half-hour or so, suddenly said:

"A strange idea has occurred to me, signore. You will recollect that I learned in the Via Cristofano that the Signor Melandrini wore gold-rimmed glasses. Is it possible that he does so in Florence, in order to conceal his defective sight?"

"Why—I believe so!" I cried. "I believe you've guessed the truth! But, on the other hand, neither his servant nor the neighbors suspected him of being a foreigner."

"He speaks Italian very well," agreed the old man; "but they said he had a slight accent."

"Well," I said, excited at this latest theory, "return at once to the Via San Cristofano and make further inquiries regarding the mysterious individual's eyesight and his glasses. The old woman who keeps his rooms has, no doubt, seen him without his glasses, and can tell you the truth."

"Signore," was the old fellow's answer. And I then wrote down for him my address in London, to which he was to despatch a telegram if his suspicions were confirmed.

Ten minutes later the roaring Calais-Rome express, the limited train of three *wagon-lits*, dining-car, and baggage-car, ran into the great vaulted station. Wishing the queer old Babbo farewell, I climbed in, and was allotted my berth.

To describe the long, wearying journey back from the Mediterranean to the Channel, with those wheels grinding forever beneath, and the monotony only broken by the announcement that a meal was ready, is useless.

Suffice it to say that thirty-six hours after entering the express at Pisa, I crossed the platform at Charing Cross, in London; jumped into a hansom, and drove to Great Russell Street.

Reggie was not yet back from his warehouse, but on my table among a quantity of letters I found a telegram in Italian from Babbo. It ran:

Melandrini has left eye injured. Undoubtedly same man. CARLINI.

The individual who was destined to be Mabel Blair's secretary and adviser was her dead father's bitterest enemy—the Englishman, Dick Dawson.

I stood staring at the telegram, utterly stupefied.

The strange couplet which the dead man had written in his will, and urged upon me to recollect, kept running in my head:

King Henry the Eighth was a knave to his queens,
He's one short of seven—and nine or ten scenes!

What hidden meaning could it convey? The historic facts of King Henry's marriages and divorces were known to me just as they were known to every fourth-standard English child throughout the country. Yet there was certainly some motive why Blair should have placed the rime there—perhaps as a key to something, but to what?

After a hurried wash and brush up, for I was very dirty and fatigued after my long journey, I took a cab to Grosvenor Square, where I found Mabel sitting reading in her own cozy room—an apartment which her father two years ago had fitted tastefully and luxuriously as her boudoir.

She sprang to her feet and greeted me eagerly when the man announced me.

"Then you are back again, Mr. Greenwood!" she cried. "Oh, I'm so very glad! I've been wondering and wondering that I had heard no news of you. Where have you been?"

"In Italy," I answered. "I have been making inquiries."

"And what have you discovered?"

"Several facts which tend rather to increase than to elucidate the mystery surrounding your father."

I saw that her face was paler than it had been when I left London, and that she seemed unnerved and strangely anxious.

I asked her why she had not gone to Brighton, or to some place on the coast as I had suggested, but she replied that she preferred to remain at

home, and that in truth she had been anxiously awaiting my return.

I explained to her in brief what I had discovered in Italy; told her of my meeting with the Capuchin brother, and of our curious conversation.

"I never heard my father speak of him," she said. "What kind of man is he?"

I described him as best I could, and told her how I had met him at dinner during her absence with Mrs. Percival in Scotland.

"I thought that a monk, having once entered an order, could not reassume the ordinary garments of secular life," she remarked.

"Neither can he," I said. "That very fact increases the suspicion against him, combined with the words I overheard later outside the Empire Theater."

And then I went on to relate the incident.

She was silent for some time, her delicate, pointed chin resting upon her palm, as she gazed thoughtfully into the fire. Then at last she asked:

"And what have you found out regarding this mysterious Italian in whose hands my father has left me? Have you seen him?"

"No, I have not seen him, Mabel. But I have discovered that he is a middle-aged Englishman, and not an Italian at all. I shall not, I think, be jealous of his attentions to you, for he has a defect—he has only one eye."

"Only one eye!" she gasped, her face blanching. "A man with one eye—and an Englishman! Why," she cried, "you surely don't say that the man in question is named Dawson—Dick Dawson?"

"Paolo Melandrini and Dick Dawson are one and the same," I said plainly, utterly amazed at the terrifying effect my words had had upon her.

"But surely my father has not left me in the hands of that fiend—the man whose very name is synonymous with all that is cunning, evil, and brutal? It can't be true—there must be some mistake, Mr. Greenwood—there must be! Ah! you do not know the reputation

of that one-eyed Englishman as I do, or you would wish me dead rather than see me in association with him. You must save me!" she cried in terror, bursting into a torrent of tears. "You promised to be my friend. You must save me; save me from that man—the man whose very touch deals death!"

And next instant she reeled—fainted in my arms.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. RICHARD DAWSON.

I confess that I was longing for the appearance of this one-eyed Englishman of whom Mabel Blair was evidently so terrified. I wanted to judge him for myself.

What I had gathered concerning him was by no means satisfactory. That, in common with the monk, he held the secret of the dead man's past seemed practically certain; and perhaps Mabel feared some unwelcome revelation concerning her father's actions and the source of his wealth. This was the thought which occurred to me when, having raised the alarm which brought the faithful companion, Mrs. Percival, I was assisting to apply restoratives to the insensible girl.

As she lay, her head pillowed upon a cushion of daffodil silk, Mrs. Percival knelt beside her, and, being in ignorance, held me, I think, in considerable suspicion. She inquired rather sharply the reason of Mabel's unconsciousness, but I merely replied that she had been seized with a sudden faintness, and attributed it to the overheating of the room.

Presently, when she came to, she asked Mrs. Percival and her maid Bowers to leave us alone, and after the door had shut she inquired, pale-faced and anxious:

"When is this man Dawson to come here?"

"When Mr. Leighton gives him notice of the clause in your father's will."

"He can come here," she said determinedly, "but before he crosses this threshold I shall leave the house. He

may act just as he thinks proper, but I will not reside under the same roof with him, nor will I have any communication with him whatsoever."

"I quite understand your feelings, Mabel," I said. "But is such a course a judicious one? Will it not be best to wait and watch the fellow's movements?"

"Ah! but you don't know him!" she cried. "You don't suspect what I know to be the truth."

"What's that?"

"No," she said, in a low, hoarse voice, "I may not tell you. You will discover all ere long, and then you will not be surprised that I abhor the very name of the man."

"But why on earth did your father insert such a clause in his will?"

"Because he was compelled," she answered hoarsely. "He could not help himself."

"And if he had refused—refused to place you in the power of such a person—what then?"

"It would have meant his ruin. I suspected it the instant I heard that a mysterious man was to be my secretary and to have control of my affairs. Your discovery in Italy has only confirmed my suspicions."

"But you will take my advice, Mabel, and bear with him at first," I urged.

She shook her head. "I regret that I am not sufficiently diplomatic to be able to conceal my antipathy in that manner. We women are clever in many ways, but we must always exhibit our dislikes."

"Well," I said, "it will be a very great pity to treat him with open hostility, for it may upset all our future chances of success in discovering the truth regarding your poor father's death, and the theft of his secret. My strong advice is to remain quite silent, apathetic even, and yet with a keen, watchful eye. Sooner or later this man, if he really is your enemy, must betray himself. Then will be time enough for us to act firmly; and, in the end, you will triumph. For my own part, I consider that the sooner Leighton gives

the fellow notice of his appointment the better."

"But is there no way by which this can be avoided?" she cried, dismayed. "Surely my father's death is sufficiently painful without this second misfortune!"

She spoke to me as frankly as she would have done to a brother, and I recognized by her intense manner how, now that her suspicions were confirmed, she had become absolutely desperate. Amid all the luxury and magnificence of that splendid place, she was a wan and lonely figure, her young heart torn by grief at her father's death and by a terror which she dared not divulge.

We sat for a long time discussing the situation. The reason of her hatred of the man Dawson she would not divulge, but this did not cause me any real surprise, for I saw in her attitude a desire to conceal some secret of her father's past. Nevertheless, after much persuasion, I induced her to consent to allow the man to be informed of his office, and to receive him without betraying any annoyance or disfavor.

This I considered a triumph of my own diplomacy. Up to a certain point I, as her best friend in those hard, dark days bygone, possessed a complete influence over her. But beyond that, when it became a question involving her father's honor, I was entirely powerless. She was a girl of strong individuality, quick of penetration, and peculiarly subject to prejudice on account of her high sense of honor.

She flattered me by declaring that she wished that I had been appointed her secretary.

"Such a thing could never have been," I said.

"Why?" she demanded.

"Because you have told me that this fellow Dawson is coming here as a matter of right. Your father wrote that unfortunate clause in his will under compulsion—which means because he stood in fear of Dawson."

"Yes," she assented in a low voice, "you are right, Mr. Greenwood. Quite right. He held my father's life in his hands."

This latter remark struck me as very strange. Could Burton Blair have been guilty of some nameless crime that he should fear this mysterious one-eyed Englishman? Perhaps so. Perhaps the man Dick Dawson, who for years had been passing as an Italian in rural Italy, was the only living witness of an incident which Blair, in his prosperous days, would have gladly given a million to efface. Such, indeed, was one of the many theories which arose within me. Yet when I recollected the bluff, good-natured honesty of Burton Blair, his sterling sincerity, his high-mindedness, and his anonymous charitable works for charity's sake, I crushed down all such suspicions, and determined only to respect the dead man's memory.

The next night, just before nine o'clock, as Reggie and I were chatting over our coffee in our cozy little dining-room in Great Russell Street, Glave, our man, tapped, entered, and handed me a card.

I sprang from my chair, as though I had received an electric shock.

"Well! This is very remarkable," I cried, turning to my friend. "Here's actually the man Dawson himself."

"Dawson!" gasped the man against whom the monk had warned me. "Let's have him in. But, by gad! we must be careful of what we say, for, if all is true of him, he has the cuteness of Old Nick himself."

"Leave him to me," I said. Then, turning to Glave: "Show the gentleman in."

And we both waited in breathless expectancy for the appearance of the man who knew the truth concerning the carefully guarded past of Burton Blair, and who, for some mysterious reason, had concealed himself so long in the guise of an Italian.

A moment later he was ushered in.

"I suppose, gentlemen," he began, "I have to introduce myself. My name is Dawson—Richard Dawson."

"And mine is Gilbert Greenwood," I said, rather distantly. "While my friend here is Reginald Seton."

"I have heard of you both from our

mutual friend, now unfortunately deceased, Burton Blair." He sank slowly into the big chair which I indicated, while I myself stood upon the hearth-rug with my back to the fire, in order to take a good look at him.

He was in well-made evening clothes, over which he wore a black overcoat, yet there was nothing about him suggestive of the man of strong character. He was of middle height, and his age I judged to be nearly fifty. He wore gold-framed eye-glasses, through which he seemed to blink at us like a German professor, and his general aspect was that of a sedate and studious man.

Beneath a patchy mass of gray-brown hair his forehead fell in wrinkled notches over a pair of sunken blue eyes, one of which looked upon the world in speculative wonder, while the other was gray, cloudy, and sightless. Straggling eyebrows wandered in a curiously uncertain manner to their meeting-place above a somewhat fleshy nose. The cheeks and beard and mustache blended in a color-scheme of gray.

From the sleeves of his overcoat, as he sat there before us, his lithe, brown fingers shot in and out, twisting and tapping the padded arms of the chair with nervous persistence, and in a manner which indicated high tension.

"My reason for intruding upon you at this hour," he said half-apologetically, yet with a mysterious smile upon his thick lips, "is because I only arrived back in London this evening, and discovered that my friend Blair has, by his will, left in my hands the control of his daughter's affairs."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, in pretended surprise, as though it were news to me. "And who has said this?"

"I have received information privately," was his evasive answer. "But before proceeding further, I thought it best to call upon you, in order that we might from the outset thoroughly understand each other. I know that both of you have been Blair's most intimate and kindest friends, while owing to certain somewhat curious circumstances I have been compelled, until today, to remain entirely in the back-

ground, his friend in secret as it were. I am also well aware of the circumstances in which you met; of your charity to my dear friend and to his daughter—in fact, he told me everything, for he had no secrets from me. Yet on your part," he continued, glancing at us from one to the other with that single blue eye, "you must have regarded his sudden wealth as a complete mystery."

"We certainly have," I remarked.

"Ah!" he exclaimed quickly, in a tone of ill-concealed satisfaction. "Then he has revealed to you nothing!"

And in an instant I saw that I had inadvertently told the fellow exactly what he most desired to know.

CHAPTER XIII.

BURTON BLAIR'S SECRET IS REVEALED.

"Whatever Burton Blair told me was in strictest confidence," I exclaimed, representing the fellow's intrusion, yet secretly glad to have that opportunity of meeting him and of endeavoring to ascertain his intentions.

"Of course," answered Dawson, with a smile, his one shining eye blinking at me from behind his gold-rimmed glasses. "But his friendliness and gratitude never led him sufficiently far to reveal to you his secret. No. I think, if you will pardon me, Mr. Greenwood, it is useless for us to fence in this manner, having regard to the fact that I know rather more of Burton Blair and his past life than you ever have done."

"Admitted," I said. "Blair was always very reticent. He set himself to solve some mystery and achieved his object."

"And by doing so gained over two millions sterling which people still regard as a mystery. There is, however, no mystery about those heaps of securities lying at his banks, nor about the cash with which he purchased them," he laughed. "It was good Bank of England notes, and solid gold coin of the realm. But now he's dead, poor fellow! it has all come to an end," he added, with a slightly reflective air.

"But his secret still exists," Reggie remarked. "He has bequeathed it to my friend here."

"What!" snapped the man with one eye, turning to me in sheer amazement. "He has left his secret with you?"

He seemed utterly staggered by Reggie's words, and I noted the evil glitter in his glance.

"He has. The secret is now mine," I answered; although I did not tell him that the mysterious little wash-leather bag was missing.

"But don't you know what that involves, man?" he cried; and, having risen from his chair, he now stood before me, his thin fingers twitching with excitement.

"No, I don't," I said, laughing in an endeavor to treat his words lightly. "He has left me as a legacy the little bag he always carried, together with certain instructions which I shall endeavor to act upon."

"Very well," he snarled. "Do just as you think fit, only I would rather you were left possessor of that secret than I—that's all."

His dismay and annoyance apparently knew no bounds. He strove hard to conceal it, but without avail. It was therefore at once plain that there was some very strong motive why the secret should not be allowed to fall into my possession. Yet his belief that the little sachet had already passed into my hands negatived my theory that this mysterious person was in any way connected with Burton Blair's death.

"Believe me, Mr. Dawson," I said quite calmly, "I entertain no fear of the result of my friend's kind generosity. Indeed, I can see no ground for any apprehension. Blair discovered a mystery which, by dint of long patience and almost superhuman effort, he succeeded in solving, and I presume that, possibly from a feeling of some little gratitude for the small help my friend and myself were able to render him, he has left his secret in my keeping."

The man remained silent for several moments, with that single, irritating eye fixed upon me immovably.

"Ah!" he exclaimed at last, with im-

patience, "I see that you are in utter ignorance. Perhaps it is as well that you should remain so." Then he added: "But let us talk of another matter—of the future."

"Well?" I inquired. "What of it?"

"I am appointed secretary to Mabel Blair, and the controller of her affairs."

"And I promised Burton Blair upon his death-bed to guard and protect the young lady's interests," I retorted, in a cold, calm voice.

"Then may I ask, now we are upon the subject, whether you entertain matrimonial intentions toward her?"

"No, you shall not ask me anything of the kind," I blazed forth. "Your question is a piece of outrageous impertinence, sir."

"Come, come, Gilbert," Reggie interposed. "There's surely no need to quarrel."

"None whatever," declared Mr. Richard Dawson, with a supercilious air. "The question is quite simple, and one which I, as the future controller of the young lady's fortune, have a perfect right to ask. I understand," he added, "that she has grown to be very attractive and popular."

"Your question is one which I refuse to answer," I repeated, with considerable warmth. "I might just as well demand of you the reason why you have been lying low in Italy all these years, or why you received letters addressed to a back street in Florence."

His jaw dropped, his brows slightly contracted, and I saw that my remark caused him some apprehension.

"Oh! and how are you aware that I have lived in Italy?"

But in order to mislead him I smiled mysteriously and replied:

"The man who holds Burton Blair's secret also holds certain secrets concerning his friends." Then I added meaningly: "The Ceco is well known in Florence and in Lucca."

His face blanched, his thin, sinewy fingers moved again, and the twitching at the corners of his mouth showed how intensely excited he had become at that mention of his nickname.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "He has played

me false, then, after all—he has told you that—eh? Very well!" And he laughed the strange, hollow laugh of a man who contemplates revenge. "Very well, gentlemen. I see my position in this affair is that of an intruder."

"To tell you the truth, sir, it is," said Reggie. "You were unknown until the dead man's will was read, and I do not anticipate that the young lady will care to be compelled to employ a stranger."

"A stranger!" he echoed, with a haughty touch of sarcasm. "Dick Dawson a stranger! No, sir, you will find that to her I am no stranger. On the other hand, you will, I think, discover that instead of resenting my interference, the young lady will rather welcome it. Wait and see," he added, with a strangely confident air. "To-morrow I intend to call upon Mr. Leighton, and to take up my duties as secretary to the daughter of the late Burton Blair, millionaire." And laying stress on the final word, he laughed again defiantly in our faces.

He was not a gentleman. I decided that on the instant he had entered the room. Outwardly his bearing was that of one who had mixed with respectable people, but it was only a veneer of polish, for when he grew excited he was just as uncouth as the bluff seafarer who had so suddenly expired. His accent was pronouncedly cockney, even though it was said he had lived in Italy so many years that he had almost become an Italian. A man who is a real-born Londoner can never disguise his nasal "n's," even though he live his life at the uttermost ends of the earth. We had both quickly detected that the stranger, though of rather slim build, was unusually muscular. And this was the man who had had those frequent secret interviews with the grave-eyed Capuchin, Fra Antonio.

That he stood in no fear of us had been shown by the bold and open manner in which he had called, and the frankness with which he had spoken. He was entirely confident in his own position, and was inwardly chuckling at our own ignorance.

"You speak of me as a stranger, gentlemen," he said, buttoning his overcoat after a short pause and taking up his stick. "I suppose I am to-night—but I shall not be so to-morrow. Very soon, I hope, we shall learn to know one another better, then perhaps you will trust me a little further than you do this evening. Recollect that I have for many years been the dead man's most intimate friend."

It was on the point of my tongue to remark that the reason of the strange clause in the will was because of poor Burton's fear of him, and that it had been inserted under compulsion, but I fortunately managed to restrain myself, and to wish the fellow good evening with some show of politeness.

"Well, I'm hanged, Gilbert!" cried Reggie, when the one-eyed man had gone. "The situation grows more interesting and complicated every moment. Leighton has a tough customer to deal with, that's very evident."

"Yes," I sighed. "He has the best of us all round, because Blair evidently took him completely into his confidence."

"Burton treated us shabbily, that's my opinion, Greenwood," blurted forth my friend, selecting a fresh cigar, and biting off the end viciously.

"He left his secret to me," I reminded him.

"He may have destroyed it after making the will," my friend suggested.

"No, it is either hidden or has been stolen—which is not at all plain. For my own part, I consider that the theory of murder is gradually becoming dispelled. If Burton Blair had any suspicion that he might be the victim of foul play, he surely would have hinted as much to us before he died. Of that I feel absolutely convinced."

"Very probably," he remarked, rather dubiously. "But what we have now to discover is whether that little bag he wore is still in existence."

"The man Dawson was evidently in England before poor Blair's death. It may have passed into his possession."

"He would, in all probability, endeavor to get hold of it," Reggie

agreed. "We must establish where he was, and what he was doing on that day when Blair was so mysteriously seized in the train. I don't like the fellow, apart from his alias and the secrecy of friendship with Blair. He means mischief—deliberate mischief. I saw it in that one eye of his. Remember what he said about Blair giving him away. It struck me that he contemplates revenge upon poor Mabel."

"He'd better not try to injure her," I exclaimed fiercely. "I've my promise to keep to poor Burton, and I'll keep it—by Heaven, I will!—to the very letter. She sha'n't fall into the hands of that adventurer, I'll take good care."

"She's in fear of him already. I wonder why?"

"Unfortunately she won't tell me. He probably holds some guilty secret of the dead man's, the truth of which, if exposed, might, for all we know, have the effect of placing Mabel herself outside the pale of good society."

Seton grunted, lolled back in his chair, and gazed thoughtfully into the fire.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, after a brief silence, "I wonder whether that is so!"

On the following morning, as we were seated at breakfast, a note from Mabel was brought by a boy messenger, asking me to come round to Grosvenor Square at once.

I swallowed my coffee, struggled into an overcoat, and a quarter of an hour later entered the bright morning-room where the dead man's daughter, her face rather flushed by excitement, stood awaiting me.

"What's the matter?" I inquired quickly, as I took her hand. I feared that the man she loathed had already called upon her.

"Nothing serious," she laughed. "I have only a piece of very good news for you."

"For me—what?"

She placed on the table a small, plain, silver cigarette-box, upon one corner of the lid of which was engraved Burton Blair's monogram.

"See what is inside that," she com-

manded, pointing to the box before her, and smiling sweetly with profound satisfaction.

I eagerly took it in my hands and, raising the lid, peered within.

"What!" I cried aloud, almost beside myself with joy. "It can't really be!"

"Yes," she laughed. "It is."

And then, with trembling fingers, I drew forth from the box the actual object that had been bequeathed to me, the little, well-worn bag of chamois leather; the small sachet about the size of a man's palm, attached to which was a thin but very strong golden chain for suspending it around the neck.

"I found it this morning quite accidentally, just as it is, in a secret drawer in the old bureau in my father's dressing-room," she explained. "He must have placed it there for security before leaving for Scotland."

I held it in my hand utterly stupefied, yet with the most profound gratification. Did not the very fact that Blair had taken it off and placed it in that box rather than risk wearing it during that journey to the north prove that he had gone in fear of an attempt being made to obtain its possession? Nevertheless, the curious little object bequeathed to me under such strange conditions was now actually in my hand—a flat, neatly sewn bag of wash-leather that was black with age and wear, about half an inch thick, and containing something flat and hard.

Within was concealed the great secret, the knowledge of which had raised Burton Blair from a homeless seafarer into affluence.

Both of us were breathless, equally eager to ascertain the truth. Surely never in the life of any man was there presented a more interesting or a more tantalizing problem.

In silence she took up a pair of small scissors from the little writing-table in the window and handed them to me.

Then, my hand trembling with excitement, I inserted the point into the end of the leather packet, and made a long, sharp cut the whole of its length, but what fell out upon the carpet next

instant caused us both to utter loud exclamations of surprise.

Burton Blair's most treasured possession, the great secret which he had carried on his person all those years and through all those wanderings, now at last revealed, proved utterly astounding.

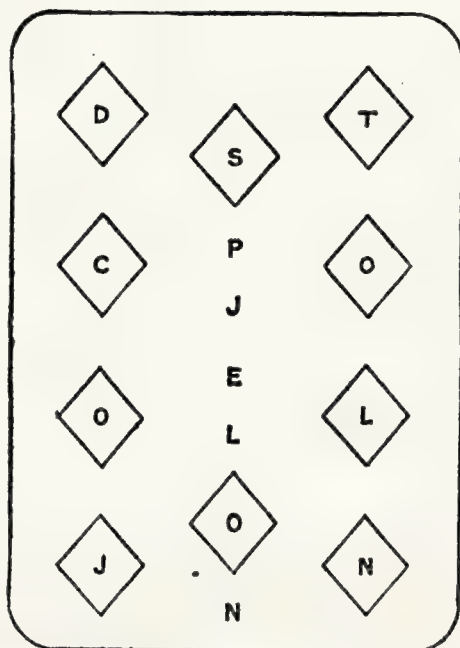
CHAPTER XIV.

GIVES AN EXPERT OPINION.

Upon the carpet at our feet lay scattered a pack of very small, rather dirty cards, which had fallen from the little sachet, and which both of us stood regarding with surprise and disappointment.

For my own part, I expected to find within that treasured bag of wash-leather something of more value than those thumbled and half worn-out pieces of pasteboard, but our curiosity was instantly aroused when, on stooping, I picked up one of them and discovered certain letters written in brown, faded ink upon it, similar to those upon the card already in my possession.

It chanced to be the ten of diamonds, and the letters were arranged thus:



"How strange!" cried Mabel, taking the card and examining it closely. "It surely must be some cipher, the same as the other card which I found sealed up in the safe."

"No doubt," I concurred, as, stooping and gathering up the remainder of the pack, I noticed that upon each of the cards, either upon the front or upon the back, were scrawled either fourteen or fifteen letters in a treble column, all, of course, utterly unintelligible.

I counted them. It was a piquet pack of thirty-one, the missing card being the ace of hearts, which we had already discovered. By the friction caused by being carried on the person for so long, the corners and edges were worn, while the gloss of the surface had long ago disappeared.

Aided by Mabel, I spread them all upon the table, utterly bewildered by the columns of letters, which showed that some deep secret was written upon them; yet what that secret was we were utterly unable to decipher.

Upon the front of the ace of clubs fifteen letters were scrawled in three parallel columns of five letters each, thus:

E	H	N
W	E	D
T	O	L
I	E	H
W	H	R

I turned up the king of spades, and found on the reverse only fourteen letters:

Q	W	F
T	S	W
J	H	U
O	F	E
Y	E	

"I wonder what it all means!" I exclaimed, carefully examining the written characters in the light. The letters were in capitals, just as rudely and unevenly drawn as those upon the ace of hearts, evidently by an uneducated hand. Indeed, the "A's" betrayed a foreign form rather than English; and the fact that some of the cards were inscribed on the obverse and others on the reverse seemed to convey some hidden meaning. What it was, however, was both tantalizing and puzzling.

"It certainly is very curious," Mabel remarked, after she had vainly striven to construct intelligible words from the columns of letters by the easy methods of calculation. "I had no idea that my father carried his secret concealed in this manner."

"Yes," I said, "it really is amazing. No doubt his secret is really written here, if we only had the key. But in all probability his enemies are aware of its existence, or he would not have left it here when he set forth on his journey to Manchester. That man Dawson may know it."

"Most probably," was her reply. "He was my father's intimate acquaintance."

"His friend—he says he was."

"Friend!" she cried resentfully. "No, his enemy."

"And therefore your father held him in fear? It was that reason which induced him to insert that very injudicious clause in his will."

And then I described to her the visit of the man Dawson on the previous night, telling her what he had said, and his impudent, defiant attitude toward us.

She sighed, but uttered no reply. I noticed that as I spoke her countenance went a trifle paler, but she remained silent, as though she feared to speak lest she should inadvertently expose what she intended should remain a secret.

My chief thought at that moment, however, was the elucidation of the problem presented by those thirty-two well-thumbed cards. The secret of Burton Blair, the knowledge of which had brought him his millions, was hidden there, and as it had been bequeathed to me, it was surely to my interest to exert every effort to gain exact knowledge of it.

I recollected how very careful he had been over that little bag which now lay empty upon the table, and with what sublime confidence he had shown it to me on that night when he was but a homeless wanderer tramping the muddy turnpike roads.

As he held it in his hand, his eyes had brightened with keen anticipation.

He would be a rich man some day, he had prophesied, and I, in my ignorance, had then believed him to be romancing. But when I looked around that room, with its splendid paintings, each of them worth a small fortune, I was bound to confess that I had wrongly mistrusted him.

And the secret written upon that insignificant-looking pack of cards was mine—if only I could decipher it!

Surely no situation could be more tantalizing to a poor man like myself. The man whom I had been able to befriend had left me, in gracious recognition, the secret of the source of his enormous income; yet so well concealed was it that neither Mabel nor myself could decipher it.

"What will you do?" she inquired presently, after poring over the cards in silence for quite ten minutes. "Is there no expert in London who might find out the key? Surely those people who make cryptograms could help us?"

"Certainly," was my answer; "but in that case, if they were successful, they would discover the secret for themselves."

"Ah, I never thought of that!"

"Your father's directions in his will as to secrecy are very explicit."

"But possession of these cards without the key is surely not of much benefit," she argued. "Could you not consult somebody, and ascertain by what means such records are deciphered?"

"I might make inquiries in a general way," I answered, "but to place the pack of cards blindly in the hands of an expert would, I fear, simply be giving away your father's most confidential possession. There may be written here some fact which it is not desirable that the world shall know."

"Ah!" she said, glancing quickly up at me. "Some facts regarding his past, you mean? Yes, you are quite right, Mr. Greenwood. We must be very careful to guard the secret of these cards well, especially if, as you suggest, the man Dawson really knows the means by which the record may be rendered intelligible."

"The secret has been bequeathed to

me, therefore I will take possession of them," I said. "I will also make inquiries, and ascertain by what means such ciphers are rendered into plain English."

I had at that moment thought of a man named Boyle, a professor at a training college in Leicester who was an expert at anagrams, ciphers, and such things, and I intended to lose no time in running up there to see him and ascertain his opinion.

Therefore at noon I took train at St. Pancras, and about half-past two was sitting with him in his private room at the college. He was a middle-aged, clean-shaven man of quick intelligence, who had frequently won prizes in various competitions offered by different journals; a man who seemed to have committed the classics to memory, and whose ingenuity in deciphering puzzles was unequalled.

While smoking a cigarette with him, I explained the point upon which I desired his opinion.

"May I see the cards?" he inquired, removing his brier from his mouth and looking at me with some surprise, I thought.

My first impulse was to refuse him sight of them, but, on second thoughts, I recollected that of all men, he was one of the greatest experts in such matters, therefore I drew the little pack from the envelope in which I had placed them.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, the moment he took them in his hand and ran quickly through them. "This, Mr. Greenwood, is the most complicated and most difficult of all ciphers. It was in vogue in Italy and Spain in the seventeenth century, and afterward in England, but seems to have dropped into disuse during the past hundred years or so, probably on account of its great difficulty."

Carefully he spread the cards out in suits upon the table, and seemed to make long and elaborate calculations between the heavy puffs at his pipe.

"No," he exclaimed. "It isn't what I expected. Guesswork will never help you in this solution. You might try for a hundred years to decipher it,

but will fail, if you do not find the key. Indeed, so much ingenuity is shown in it that a writer in the last century estimated that in such a pack of cards as this, with such a cipher upon them, there are at least fully fifty-two millions of possible arrangements."

"But how is the cipher written?" I inquired, much interested, yet with heart-sinking at his inability to aid me.

"It is done in this way," he said. "The writer of the secret settles what he wishes to record, and arranges the thirty-two cards in what order he wishes. He then writes the first thirty-two letters of his message record, or whatever it may be, on the face or on the back of the thirty-two cards, one letter upon each card consecutively, commencing with the first column, and going on with columns two and three, working down each column, until he has written the last letter of the cipher. In the writing, however, certain prearranged letters are used in place of spaces, and sometimes the cipher is made still more difficult for a chance finder of the cards to decipher by the introduction of a specially arranged shuffle of the cards half-way through the writing of the record."

"Very ingenious," I remarked, utterly bewildered by the extraordinary complication of Burton Blair's secret. "And yet the letters are so plainly written!"

"That's just it," he laughed. "To the eye it is the plainest of all ciphers, and yet one that is utterly unintelligible unless the exact formula in its writing be known. When that is ascertained, the solution becomes easy. The cards are rearranged in the order in which they were written upon, and the record or message spelled off, one letter on each card in succession, reading down one column after another, and omitting the letter arranged as spaces."

"Ah!" I exclaimed fervently, "how I wish I knew the key!"

"Is this a very important secret, then?" asked Boyle.

"Very," I replied. "A confidential matter which has been placed in my hands, and one which I am bound to solve."

"I fear you will never do so unless the key is in existence," was his answer. "It is far too difficult for me to attempt. The complications which are so simply effected in the writing, shield it effectually from any chance solution. Therefore, all endeavors to decipher it without knowledge of the prearrangement of the pack must necessarily prove futile."

He replaced the cards in the envelope and handed them back to me, regretting that he could not render me assistance.

"You might try every day for years and years," he declared, "and you would be no nearer the truth. It is too well protected for chance discovery, and is, indeed, the safest and most ingenious cipher ever devised by man's ingenuity."

I remained and took a cup of tea with him, then at half-past four entered the express and returned to London, disappointed at my utterly fruitless errand. What he had explained to me rendered the secret more impenetrable and inscrutable than ever.

CHAPTER XV.

CERTAIN THINGS WE FOUND AT MAY-VILL.

"Miss Blair, sir!" announced Glave next day just before noon, while I was sitting alone in my room in Great Russell Street, smoking vigorously, and utterly bewildered over the problem of the dead man's pack of cards.

I sprang to my feet to welcome Mabel, who in her rich, warm furs was looking very dainty and charming.

"I suppose if Mrs. Percival knew I had come here alone, she'd give me a sound lecture against visiting a man's rooms," she said, laughing, after I had greeted her and closed the door.

"Well," I said, "it's scarcely the first time you've honored me with a visit, is it? And surely you need not trouble very much about Mrs. Percival."

"Oh, she really grows more straight-backed every day," Mabel pouted. "I

mustn't go here, and I mustn't go there; and she's afraid of me speaking to this man, and the other man is not to be known, and so on. I'm really growing rather sick of it, I can tell you," she declared, seating herself in the chair I had just vacated, unloosing her heavy sable cape, and stretching a neat ankle to the fire.

"But she's been an awfully good friend to you," I argued. "As far as I can see, she's been the most easy-going of chaperons."

"The perfect chaperon is the one who can utterly and effectually efface herself five minutes after entering the room," Mabel declared. "And I will give Mrs. Percival her due, she's never clung on to me at dances; and if she's found me sitting out in a dim corner, she has always made it a point to have an urgent call in an opposite direction. Yes," she sighed, "I suppose I oughtn't to grumble when I recollect the snappy old tabbies in whose hands some girls are."

"Well," I said, standing on the hearth-rug and looking down at her handsome figure, "I really don't think you have had much to complain about up to the present. Your father was most indulgent, and I'm sure Mrs. Percival, although she may seem rather harsh at times, is only speaking for your own benefit."

"Oh, I know I'm a very wilful girl in your eyes," she exclaimed, with a smile. "You always used to say so when I was at school."

"Well, to tell the truth, you were," I answered quite frankly.

"Of course. You men never make allowance for a girl. You assume your freedom with your first long trousers, while we unfortunate girls are not allowed a single moment alone, either inside the house or out of it. No matter whether we be as ugly as Mother Ship-ton or as beautiful as Venus, we must all of us be tied up to some elder woman, who very often is just as fond of a mild flirtation as the simpering young miss in her charge. Forgive me for speaking so candidly, won't you, Mr. Greenwood? but my opinion is that the

modern methods of society are all sham and humbug."

"You're not in a very polite mood to-day, it seems," I remarked, being unable to restrain a smile.

"No, I'm not," she admitted. "Mrs. Percival is so very aggravating. I want to go down to Mayvill this afternoon, and she won't let me go alone."

"Why do you so particularly wish to go there alone?"

She flushed slightly, and appeared for a moment to be confused.

"Oh, well, I don't want to go alone very particularly, you know," she tried to assure me. "It is the foolishness of not allowing me to travel down there like any other girl that I object to. If a maid can take a railway journey alone, why can't I?"

"Because you have the *convenances* of society to respect—the domestic servant need not."

"Then I prefer the lot of the domestic," she declared, in a manner which told me that something had annoyed her.

For my own part, I should have regretted very much if Mrs. Percival had consented to her going down to Herefordshire alone, while it also seemed apparent that she had some secret reason of her own for not taking her elder companion with her.

What, I wondered, could it be?

I inquired the reason why she wished to go to Mayvill without even a maid, but she explained that she wanted to see that the other four hunters were being properly treated by the studsman, and also to make a search through her father's study to ascertain whether any important or confidential papers remained there. She had the keys, and intended to do this before that odious person, Dawson, assumed his office.

This suggestion, evidently made as an excuse, struck me as one that really should be acted upon without delay, yet it was so very plain that she desired to go alone, that at first I hesitated to offer to accompany her. Our friendship was of such a close and intimate character, that I could, of course, offer to do so without overstepping the

bounds of propriety; nevertheless, I resolved to first endeavor to learn the reason of her strong desire to travel alone.

She was a clever woman, however, and had no intention of telling me. She had a strong and secret desire to go down alone to that fine old country house that was now her own, and did not desire that Mrs. Percival should accompany her.

"If you are really going to search the library, Mabel, had I not better accompany and help you?" I suggested presently. "That is, of course, if you will permit me," I added apologetically.

For a moment she was silent, as though devising some means out of a dilemma, then she answered:

"If you'll come, I'll of course be only too delighted. Indeed, you really ought to assist me, for we might discover some key to the cipher on the cards. My father was down there for three days about a fortnight before his death."

"When shall we start?"

"At three-thirty from Paddington. Will that suit you? You shall come and be my guest." And she laughed mischievously at such utter break-up of the *convenances*, and the probable chagrin of the long-suffering Mrs. Percival.

"Very well," I agreed; and ten minutes later I went down with her, and put her, smiling sweetly, into her smart victoria.

You perceive that I was playing a very dangerous game? And so I was; as you will afterward see.

At the hour appointed I met her at Paddington, and we traveled together down to Dunmore Station, beyond Hereford. Here we entered the brougham awaiting us, and, after a drive of nearly three miles, descended before the splendid old mansion which Burton Blair had bought two years before for the sake of the shooting and fishing surrounding it.

Standing in its fine park, half-way between King's Pyon and Dilwyn, Mayvill Court was, and is still, one of the show places of the county. It was

an ideal ancestral hall. The grand old gabled house, with its lofty square towers, its Jacobean entrance, gateway, and dove-cot, and the fantastically clipped box-trees and sun-dial of its quaint, old-fashioned garden, possessed a delightful charm which few other ancient mansions could boast, and a still further interesting feature lay in its perfectly unaltered state throughout, even to the minutest detail.

For close on three hundred years it had been held by its original owners, the Baddesleys, until Blair had purchased it—furniture, pictures, armor; everything just as it stood.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Mrs. Gibbons, the elderly housekeeper, welcomed us, in tears at the death of her master, and we passed into the great oak-paneled hall, in which hung the sword and portrait of the gallant cavalier, Captain Harry Baddesley, of whom there still was told a romantic story.

Narrowly escaping from the battlefield, the captain spurred homeward, with some of Cromwell's soldiers close at his heels; and his wife, a lady of great courage, had scarcely concealed him in the secret chamber when the enemy arrived to search the house. Little daunted, the lady assisted them, and personally conducted them over the mansion. As in so many instances, the secret room was entered from the principal bedroom, and in inspecting the latter, the Roundheads had their suspicions aroused. So they decided to stay the night.

The hunted man's wife sent them an ample supper, and some wine which had been carefully drugged, with the result that the unwelcome visitors were very soon soundly asleep, and the gallant captain, before the effects of the wine had worn off, was far beyond their reach.

Since that day the old place had remained absolutely unchanged, with its rows of dark, time-mellowed family portraits in the big hall; its Jacobean furniture, and its old helmets and pikes that had borne the brunt of Naseby.

The night was bitterly cold. In the great open hearth huge logs were bla-

zing, and, as we stood there to warm ourselves after our journey, Mrs. Gibbons, who had been apprised of our advent by telegraph, announced that she had prepared supper for us, as she knew we could not arrive in time for dinner.

Both she and her husband expressed the deepest sympathy with Mabel in her bereavement, and then, having removed our coats, we went on into the small dining-room, where supper was served by Gibbons and the footman with that old-fashioned stateliness characteristic of all in that fine old-world mansion.

Gibbons and his wife, old retainers of the former owners, were, I think, somewhat surprised that I had accompanied their young mistress alone; nevertheless, Mabel had explained to them how she wished to make a search of her father's effects in the library, and that for that reason she had invited me to accompany her. Yet I must confess that I, on my part, had not yet formed any conclusion as to the real reason of her visit. That there was some ulterior motive in it I felt certain, but what it was I could not even guess.

After supper Mrs. Gibbons took my pretty companion to her room, while Gibbons showed me the one prepared for me—a long chamber on the first floor, from the windows of which I had a wide view over the undulating lawns to Wormsley Hill and Sarnes-

field. I had occupied the room on several occasions, and knew it well, with its great old carved four-poster bed, antique hangings, and polished oaken ceiling.

After a wash I rejoined my dainty little hostess in the library—a big, long, old room, where a fire, burned brightly, and the lamps were softly shaded with yellow silk. Over the fireplace were carved in stone the three water-bouquets of the Baddesleys, with the date 1601, while the whole room from end to end was lined with brown-backed books that had probably not been disturbed for half a century.

After Mabel had allowed me a cigarette, and told Gibbons that she did not wish to be disturbed for an hour or so, she rose and turned the key behind the servants, so that we might carry out the work of investigation without interruption.

"Now," she said, turning her fine eyes upon me with an excitement she could not suppress as she walked to the big writing-table and took her father's keys from her pocket, "I wonder whether we shall discover anything of interest. I suppose," she added, "it is really Mr. Leighton's duty to do this. But I prefer that you and I should look into my father's affairs prior to the inquisitive lawyer's arrival."

It almost seemed as if she half-expected to discover something which she desired to conceal from the solicitor.

TO BE CONTINUED.



THE CALL OF THE PHONE

A HIGH official in a telephone company tells this story about a telephone girl who was always late in arriving in the morning. Time and again the manager had pleaded with her to be more prompt. Her tardiness continued until he was moved to desperate methods.

"Now, Miss Jones," he said one morning, as he came to her exchange with a package in his hand, "I have a little scheme which I hope will enable you to arrive at the office on time. Here is a fine alarm-clock for you. Promise me that you will use it."

The young woman promised, and accordingly set the alarm for the proper hour when she retired that night.

At seven o'clock there was a tremendous whirring from the alarm-clock.

The sleepy telephone girl rolled over in bed and said sweetly, and still asleep:

"Line engaged; call again!"

The Hall of Mirth

By B. M. Bower

Author of "Rowdy of the 'Cross L,'" "Chip of the 'Flying U,'" Etc.

In which Bud Preston, cowboy, spurred on by vigorous requests for information on the subject, assumes the role of chronicler and sets forth in his own picturesque fashion the origin and history of an elaborate "folly"



"I'll bet twenty-five different people have asked me, in the last six months, about the "Hall of Mirth," up Bent Willow way; soon as they got wise to the fact that I used to range up there, they'd fire that Hall of Mirth at me—or else want to know about Shooting-star Wilson, and how he come by that name. Seeing the two kind of go together, I've had to drop everything and read 'em the pedigree of both, till I'm plumb tired of being old Shooting-star's walking biography. Now I'm laid by for repairs, I had a hunch that it wouldn't be a bad idea to write it down complete, with all the details. Then the next jasper that comes along asking questions, I'll just hand over the history and tell him to go away off, somewheres, and set down and read it by his high lonesome, and, for Heaven's sake, let me be. So this is the how:

Shooting-star used to be plain old Bill Wilson; he wasn't so old, neither—fifty, maybe. But some folks tack that "old" onto any man that's out of the twenties and don't seem to cut many lemons in the world, and is too peaceful-minded to make a kick—which was old Bill to a dot.

He had a ranch on Bent Willow Creek, and a few hundred head of stock—and he was an old bach, of course. A wife would have put her foot down on any foolishness—but her own—and he'd 'a' been just old Bill

Wilson long as he lived, and nobody would 'a' cared two cents what he done or what folks called him, and why. Far as I'm concerned, I'm glad old Bill didn't have no wife to spoil the fun, which was sure worth the price of admission—and then some.

The way it started—I forgot to say that I was working for old Bill that winter—I'd been in to Bent Willow after the mail and a new bridle-bit. That old dapple buckskin I ride had got gay and broke my bit; snapped it short off like a stick of macaroni. So I had to ride to town, and old Bill told me to bring the mail out.

Most generally there wasn't nothing but the *River Press*—except once in awhile when they'd deal us the *Montana Stockman*. But this time I drew a foreign-looking letter with the old queen on the stamp, and "Somebody & Somebody, Barristers-at-Law," up in the corner.

I was most as disconcerted as if I'd got four aces, with five hundred in the pot. I felt it in my bones that this letter was going to drop into our peaceful, home-and-fireside life like plunking a big rock out into a still lake; and I guessed right—it sure did.

So, having that in my pocket, and a burning curiosity all inside of me, I never stopped anywheres—not even for a game of billiards with Pete Thomas, which I never had passed up before, seeing I could give him thirty and then beat him nine times out of nine. No, sir, I got my bridle-bit and pulled out for home immediate. And old Bill like

to fell dead when he seen me back so quick, and yelled at me to know who's killed *now*. (Old Bill had lived in Montana when times was a lot more strenuous, and old Papa Death kept his mowing-machine in gear, day and night.)

I handed him the letter, and hung around till he'd read it—and he was most mortal slow about it, I remember, but I was sure paid for waiting patient. For he takes off his specs and looks at me like he didn't see me for a minute, and then slaps me on the shoulder and grins kinda sickly, like a kid called up to speak a piece before company.

"Bud," he says, "I've drawed a royal flush. I've had money left to me; *ten thousand dollars*—and the Lord only knows what I'll do with it all!"

I looked down at him some dubious, till I seen he wasn't joshing. "Well," I says, "yuh might buy a few decent saddle-horses for me and Ellis to ride, for a starter."

But he didn't seem to grab the idea very enthusiastic. He kinda grunted, and wanted to know what ailed them we had, and then he ambled off before I got a chance to tell him. I thought then, and I still think, that if he was hurting to know how to spend his money, he might 'a' paid for that bridle-bit; but he didn't.

Well, for three or four days old Bill went around with his chin rubbing the top button of his coat, meditating so hard it made me and Ellis plumb nervous to watch him. There was only us two working for him—he winter-fed all his stock—and no cook, or anything. We all three eat and slept in the house, which was a three-roomed log shack, and Ellis and me took week-about at the cooking. There wasn't nothing aristocratic about old Bill. Ellis and me prophesied to each other about once a day that old Bill would hit the trail for Bent Willow and go on a toot, and maybe gamble some of that ten thousand to the bad. But we had another think coming.

It stormed for a week, so we hugged the stove when we didn't have to get

out and open water-holes or shovel hay to the cattle, and old Bill hardly stirred out of the house. He'd set in an old armchair he had, jammed up in the corner by the wood-box, and his heels stacked up on the back rim of the stove, and smoke his pipe and study over that ten thousand.

If it had been me, I'd 'a' known quick enough what to do with it—but he's a queer old cuss. He'd got used to living the way he was doing, with enough stock to keep him and pay a couple of men to do the work, and enough hay-meadow to feed the cattle, and us two fellows to keep him company and cook his grub and chore around. He'd got his habits fixed, and he'd 'a' read his *River Press* and *Stockman*, and bowled up once in awhile, and thought he was living, and been happy and content the rest of his life—only for that ten thousand.

What started him off was me, again. I went to Bent Willow for something, and Pete Thomas—he runs a saloon there—give me a big calendar, and I brought it home and hung it up over the table.

It had a picture about two feet across that sure was swell, all right. It was the picture of some dance that Napoleon, or some one, had give to the upper ten. It was all colored up, and showed a great big room in some swell palace. The women all had on dresses too short on top and too long at the bottom, like they'd all slipped down about a foot—and they was all waltzing to beat the band. You've seen that kind.

Old Bill set all evening with his boot heels scorching on the stove, and smoked and looked at that calendar. Ellis and me was playing crib, I remember, when old Bill broke loose. He brought his heels down *ker-bang!* on the floor and started me so I knocked the crib-board off the table, and the pegs fell out, so we had some argument over the count afterward. Old Bill was waving his pipe at us, and grinning to beat thunder.

"A man don't have luck like mine every day," he commenced. "When

he does, he ought to do something out uh the general run. Boys," he says, "we'll give a dance; a swell dance, just like that'n in the picture. I'll show Bent Willow what *style* is. I'll have an orchestra down from Great Falls, and a real set-down supper, with two niggers from Havre to cook it. Ten thousand dollars is a lot uh money, boys, and I ain't going to count the nickels."

Well, say! you could 'a' knocked Ellis' eyes off with clubs. He opened his mouth and kinda gasped—but I kept my head level.

"I'd love to see yuh give a swell dance in this old shack!" I told old Bill. "You couldn't dance more than one set in this room, if you moved every blame thing outdoors; and if yuh done that, where'd they eat supper? You haven't got the house, old-timer. Come again."

I guess he hadn't thought about that part, for he blinked at me, and then at the calendar, and swallowed a couple of times. Then he thumped his fist down on his knee hard, and said: "Dammit, I'll build a house that *will* have room enough! I'm going to give Bent Willow an eye-opener, now, I'm telling yuh!"

"Sail in, old-timer," I told him, and shuffled the cards and dealt. I never once thought he was taking himself serious—but that's what he was sure doing. Ever once in awhile he'd bu'st out in a new place, till Ellis and me got so rattled we muddled our counts something fierce.

Once old Bill broke out: "I'll have two parlors with an arch between that'll hold six sets apiece, by thunder!"

Ellis glanced at him furtive, and made a wild discard that ruined his hand.

"Yes, sir," says Bill, when we was counting points once, "I'll have the floors laid in them diamond-shape chunks uh wood, like they have in banks. They're awful slick; they'd be out uh sight to dance on." I looked at Ellis and he looked at me, and we stuck the pegs down promiscuous.

"And I'll have these here pot-bellied windows stuck all around the house," says Bill. "Once I get started, they's nothing small about *me*."

I raked up the cards and stacked 'em in the deck; I seen it wasn't any use trying to play crib with remarks like that fired at us every five minutes.

Old Bill was that enthusiastic he could hardly wait for daylight. I know he never slept none, because every so often he'd say things out loud about green velvet chairs and looking-glasses ten feet across, till I had regular nightmare, and had to get up and make me a smoke to settle my nerves. Once he rared up in bed, and whispers: "Bud, yuh awake?"

"Somewhat!" I snaps back.

"Say, Bud! I'm going to have them diamond-shape chunks in the floors painted red, white, and blue, in the two parlors," he says.

"Aw, chase yourself!" I growled. "It ain't going to be any Fourth uh July dance, is it?" All this was just before Christmas.

"Well, no," he said, "but I figure on having the house ready for Washington's Birthday, and I want everything appropriate." Bill's a patriotic old cuss, I'll say that for him.

"You better have a twenty-foot flag painted on the ceiling," I told him—meaning it for sarcasm; but do you know, the old fool grabbed the idea, tickled to death, and thanked me for putting him in mind of it! That sure was the limit; I was so plumb disgusted I flopped over and commenced to snore, which kinda choked him off, and he kept still till I got to sleep.

Next morning he bolted his breakfast like he was due to relieve last guard, and saddled up and put to town, hell-bent-for-election. He told us he didn't know when he'd be back, and we didn't give a darn. We hoped he'd stay till he got the kinks out of his think-works—but not any for Bill! Inside a week he was back, with men and teams stringing along behind like the tail of a comet.

There was a contractor sharp from

Great Falls, that was head push, and had Bill's house all planned out on paper, down to the last nail and the last shingle. And there was loads of lumber and carpenters roosting on top like snowbirds on a fence-rail, and a cook to feed 'em, and a big tent for 'em to all live in.

After that, there was things doing at the Billy Wilson ranch, now, I'm telling you. It looked to me and Ellis like sleight-o'-hand, the way that house grew up out of the lumber-piles scattered around the yard. But it couldn't grow fast enough to suit old Bill. The winter was mostly good weather, and that helped a lot; but whatever kind of day was dealt out of the deck, old Bill seen that it wasn't passed up.

I've seen him bundled to his eyes, walking a regular beat around that house, close-herding the carpenters and keeping 'em moving, when it was ten below. He'd have bonfires going for 'em to thaw out by, and if they kicked he'd raise their wages a dollar a lick. They got next to his system, and kicked pretty regular, I noticed; but it wasn't my funeral, nor Ellis', and we got to amusing ourselves by giving old Bill's imagination a boost, once in awhile, till that house—well, just wait till I tell you!

Bill wasn't no bluffer, and he had the two parlors just like he said he would; and the archway between was fourteen feet wide, so you could waltz and two-step the length of both rooms. Ellis and me done lots of dancing, soon as the floors was laid, with the sound of a dozen or so hammers ka-rappety-rapping for music; and old Bill would stand by and grin at us, and ask us if it wasn't great, and if Bent Willow wouldn't come alive some, when it seen his house. We told him it sure would, all right—and we meant every word a lot.

He wouldn't let none of the neighbors within a hundred yards of the place, and he made us promise not to say what it was going to be like inside; so the folks around there was ready to bu'st with curiosity.

Besides the two parlors where the

dancing was to be done, there was a big dining-room and a kitchen, and two bedrooms. There wasn't no upstairs—but, mister! that down-stairs was better than any circus I ever went to. It was sure a corker, and then some.

He had four bay windows to every room but the two bedrooms; they had to skimp along with one whopper apiece. And he had the parlor floors in diamonds, all right—big over as your hand, and painted red, white, and blue, alternate.

It made Ellis and me so dizzy, the first time we danced on 'em after they was painted and varnished—oh, you bet they was varnished! looked like glass—and we was so dizzy we run into old Bill and bowled him over like a ten-pin.

We anticipated a lot of excitement when a good-sized crowd got to peer-youetting over that razzle-dazzle floor. The colors was sure gaudy—the glaring red and blue ever I seen—and couldn't be ignored by a blind man.

But the dining-room floor—I'll tell you what he done. He made a checker-board out of that room; black and red blocks a foot square. Ellis was to the bottom of that idea—and, mister! it was sure fierce. But I wasn't none behind with my ceilings; he mistook my wit for genius, and painted the whole ceiling in stars and stripes, natural as life and four times as big.

Then I told him he ought to have the wall facing the door ornamented with a picture of George Washington, and he like to fell on my neck with gratitude. He sent all over the country, but he couldn't get one big enough to suit him; he wanted a ten-by-twelve. So finally he got Johnny Bandoover to paint him one, and paid him fifty dollars in advance to do a quick job.

Johnny done it quick, all right. But you had to think twice and then guess again to know who or what it was meant to be. Johnny's a nice boy, but the less you say about his painting the less you'll have chalked against you on the Big Book—because you'll either lie or cuss, neither of which is allowed.

Old Bill himself didn't hardly know what about it. He's about the loyalest citizen I ever went up against, and he'd die before he'd make a mockery of his country's father. But the old party in the picture wore his hair pompadoured and braided down the back (I mind Johnny had it tied with a red-white-and-blue ribbon, to match the floor and ceiling) and he had on a ruffled kind of shirt-waist under his coat. And Johnny swore, with tears in his eyes, that it was George, all right. So old Bill took it and hung it up. But his eyes had a troubled look whenever he happened to glance that way, and it's my opinion he still had his doubts, but hated to say anything.

We didn't suggest none of the furniture, though there was some that accused us of it and said the whole thing, from start to finish, was a job we'd put up on the old man. But I want to say, right here, that we never suggested a thing that was going to cost much money; old Bill done all the blowing himself, and carried out his own peculiar ideas.

Bill'd go up to the Falls and blow himself to every gaudy chair and lounge and dinky little table he got his eyes on, and come home with 'em, pleased and anxious. He'd unwrap 'em and ask us if they wasn't pretty. And Ellis and me would walk around 'em and admire everything he wanted us to, and tell him Bent Willow would sure set up and take notice—which was the truth, all right. Then we'd sneak off to the stable and slap each other on the back, and come near having hysterics, thinking of the way folks would fall backward when they seen the inside of Bill's house.

I don't know how we did get to calling it the Hall of Mirth—but I guess it just come to us, thinking of the joyfests we used to have in the barn over it. Anyway, as it got nearer done and more rainbow-colored inside, we got to calling it the Hall of Mirth to each other. And when old Bill happened to hear it, one day, he thought it was great.

Then Ellis told him he ought to have an illuminated sign—you know, with lamps inside to show off the reading at night—and have it, "Welcome to the Hall of Mirth," and put it up over the door on dance night. Old Bill ordered one made right away. When it was done, it reached clear across the front of the house, because he told 'em to make the letters plenty big—which they sure did.

That started him off on lights, and he went and ordered twelve dozen of the biggest Chinese lanterns he could get, to be strung on wires around over the outside of the house. Those lanterns liked to finished Ellis and me off, too. Dance night—which was Washington's Birthday—was still, but, oh, mister! it was cold. Ellis and me had to light them twelve dozen lanterns and string them around where they'd look the best, and we like to froze to death.

We tried to cache part of them, and cut it short; but do you think we could? No, sir! old Bill climbed into his fur coat and out he comes and counts them lanterns. We was two dozen shy—which we knew as well as he did—and he raised a dickens of a row about it and made us get busy again. Folks was beginning to come, though it wasn't but a little after seven. They was sure anxious to get inside that house, with its big "Welcome to the Hall of Mirth" staring 'em in the face.

Ellis and me wanted to see their faces when the first shock hit 'em—and we had to see to the teams being put up. So we went to old Bill, soon as we heard the first rig "screeek-ing" through the snow, and threw him a load about making it more effective if he'd pilot 'em all into the old house and close-herd 'em there till they all had pulled in, and then take 'em up to the Hall of Mirth in a bunch.

That seemed to look good to him, so he grinned and said all right.

The rigs kept pulling in—from all over Chouteau County it seemed like. We had the stable full before they fair got started, so we had to tie the

rest around to the fence. By eight o'clock I'll bet there was fifty teams tied up to the corral fence, inside and out.

Ellis and me was getting uneasy in our minds for fear they'd get into the Hall of Mirth ahead of us. But old Bill wasn't so slow, neither—and once he got an idea fixed in his head, seemed like you couldn't haul it out with a Spanish windlass. He went and pulled down all the blinds to all the bay windows—they was the only kind of windows he had—and locked the doors, with the nigger cooks and the orchestra shut up inside.

The orchestra had come out early in the afternoon, and they like to fell dead when we led 'em into the parlors. But we dosed 'em with champagne that old Bill had got ten cases of, and after an hour or so they chirked up and didn't seem to mind their surroundings so much. There was six in the bunch; two fiddles, two mandolins, a harp it took two of us to carry, and a cornet.

They sure made swell music when they all broke loose together, and in them big parlors it was simply out of sight. Seemed like the more champagne they put away inside, the better music they made, and the more of it. They played off an' on all afternoon, and old Bill set on a green velvet chair facing George Washington and listened to the music—and his face was the happiest I ever saw.

Far as the two coons was concerned—say! that house was miles ahead of heaven for looks, according to them. Ellis and me like to died laughing at one of 'em—a big, fat fellow that looked like he'd layed on a coat of stove-blackening and polished it good and vigorous; he was sure dark complexioned.

Old Bill took 'em both to see the parlors, and he stood in the archway and tried to look both ways to once, and grinned and grinned—I'll swear his teeth had been whitewashed fresh—and kept saying: "Oh, golly, ain't dis a swell place! Oh, golly ain't it swell!"

Them parlors had such a fascination for 'em that we had to lock 'em up in the kitchen to get any work out of 'em at all. They came two days before the dance, and cooked enough truck to last a round-up a solid month. It was good eating, too, you bet.

Well, a little after eight Ellis and me struck and said them that came late could tie up to the willows along the creek bank, or wherever they darned pleased; we wasn't going to stay out there any longer and miss all the fun there was going. So we brushed the horsehair off each other, and dimpled our hat-crowns fresh, and hiked up to the old house.

Say! there wasn't standing-room, hardly; all three rooms was full to the doors, like the street-cars in Chicago. Everybody seemed to be talking at once, and it sounded like a hive of hornets that's just been prodded with a pole. They was making mean and impatient remarks at old Bill for keeping 'em there, and in a few minutes more they'd 'a' mobbed him and took his keys away—so it was a good thing Ellis and me showed up when we did.

When we pushed the door open and sized up the layout, we gave old Bill the wink, and he squeezed out to where we was on the door-step, and hollered: "Welcome to the Hall of Mirth!" and we started up the hill; the mob poured out and crowded close on our heels, now, I'm telling you.

Those Chinese lanterns festooned around over the house looked nice, all right, but a little bit out of season—seeing the mercury was about fifteen below. The crowd goggle-eyed them and the sign, and told Bill he was a game old sport, and things like that, and old Bill swelled up like a toad with all the flattery he was getting. I caught a couple of the fellows nudging each other on the sly, but I never let on—and neither did Ellis. We knew they'd have something to think of besides nudging, once they got inside.

The front door opened right into the front parlor, without any hall, and you could look across through that big

archway—a straight shoot of dazzle clear to the dining-room; and that long vista of rip-roaring patriotism was sure amazing, and would 'a' made the old eagle himself throw a fit.

The leaders bunched, just inside the door, and commenced to mill, like cattle at a railroad-crossing. That floor *didn't* look human, nor as if it was made to be walked on, and that was what stuck 'em. But those behind kept pushing and crowding, and the fellows I'd caught nudging and making sport of old Bill went down in a heap; and I was glad of it.

It was all right for Ellis and me to laugh—that was kind of in the family; but it wasn't polite or proper for them that had been invited to come and have a good time, to make fun of old Bill. I stepped around on one smart Aleck, some, just to learn him manners, and I noticed Ellis tromping on the other one's leg till he squealed like a pig. Then we looked surprised and helped 'em up, and said we was sorry—which we wasn't.

We finally got 'em all inside and kinda straightened out, and I'm blamed if they didn't just line up along the wall and stare to beat four of a kind. I don't know what they expected to see, but I'll gamble it wasn't nothing like the reality.

For five minutes it was still as church just after the preacher disappears from view behind the pulpit and while the choir is hunting up the first hymn. Them gillies craned and looked, like turkeys hunting a limb to roost on; and once in awhile somebody would whisper behind their hand to somebody else. It looked like the game was stalled right there.

I seen old Bill's mouth go down at the corners, disappointed and grieved, like a kid with his feelings hurt—and I was that sorry I couldn't take but the one look. He'd worked day and night, and strained every nerve to make everything the top-notch of his idea of style, and to give Bent Willow a real treat; and here Bent Willow was, balking at his floor and furniture like a bunch of fool dogies at a patch

of glare ice. It was a rotten shame. I couldn't stand for anything like that.

I gave the orchestra the high-ball, and sung out, "Welcome to the Hall of Mirth! and get your partners for the first waltz!" and grabbed Ellis around the middle, from force of habit. He squirmed loose and gave me the bad eye, and made a break toward Susie McGee—that's the girl he's stuck on. So then I took the hint and hooked onto the first woman I come to—which wasn't the one I wanted, by a long shot!—and old Bill, he took one. And we slid out onto that red-white-and-blue floor, gay and unconcerned as you please.

That kinda broke the spell, and the crowd come alive and got their partners; and the orchestra cut loose full belt on "Daughter of Love," and—say! it was sure all right.

Ellis and me showed 'em the trick of waltzing clean through both parlors, and they followed us like a bunch of sheep. Some of the girls got dizzy looking at the floor, and come near throwing their partners; I know mine did. And there was a heap of interfering and bumping into one another, that first dance. Seemed like they couldn't keep their eyes off all them different colors, and they'd get dazzled and couldn't see straight. But take it all in all, that first dance wasn't so worse.

I'd got all over wanting to see the crowd shocked and silly; I felt, somehow, that I was responsible for that crowd's manners, and for old Bill. I wanted to see him have just as good a time as he'd dreamed of having, and the first fellow that got gay and insulting was going to be led out of the Hall of Mirth by the ear—if he wasn't over seven feet tall.

Ellis came around to where I was, after the dance, and he seemed to feel the same way about it. We was willing Bent Willow should have a laugh out of the deal—but we was going to take good care that they postponed it till they got off the ranch.

The women was the worst. A man can't lead a lady out by the ear and

work her face over, no matter what she says. Well, he *could*, I guess—but Ellis and me didn't want to take the responsibility of any innovation like that. They gathered around old Bill three deep, after that first waltz, and gabbled and gabbled, and asked questions and laughed and tittered till old Bill was red and limp, and Ellis and me was near wild.

One woman—she was the wife of a big cattleman and had a reputation for being witty that plumb spoiled her—she turned to old Bill and said, loud so every one couldn't help but hear:

"Mr. Wilson, you mustn't blame us for being a bit dazed, just at first. We're rather quiet people, and human pyrotechnics are rather startling to us."

"How's that?" said old Bill. He didn't just savvy what she meant.

"Why," she said, and smiled that sly I wished she'd been a man, "you burst upon us like a shooting-star, with all this gorgeousness. It's *overpowering*!"

Old Bill grinned and took it for a compliment, and the crowd laughed and nudged and laughed, and I could hear "Shooting-star Wilson" going the rounds. Ellis was gritting his teeth, he was so mad—and I was pretty hot under the collar myself; so I called a square-dance to kind of clear the air and keep old Bill from seeing he was being laughed at.

Right there was when old Bill dropped out, and Shooting-star Wilson come onto the scene.

We danced indefatigable till midnight, and I took two fellows out and thrashed 'em thorough, and Ellis worked another one over, so we was both tolerable busy. Then one of the coons called supper, and we formed a grand march to the dining-room, with old Bill and that spiteful witty woman in the lead. I hated to see her get the place of honor, but old Bill thought she was sure all right—and she saying mean and sarcastic things, that ambiguous he never caught on once.

Well, you ought to 'a' seen that spread! A hundred and fifty couples

eat supper—but they had to make two shifts of it, and that worried old Bill. He'd meant to have room for 'em all at once, and mourned around because about a third of 'em had to wait. But Ellis and me told him no one could guess they'd be such a crowd, and comforted him all we could. Them ten cases of champagne lasted quick, let me tell you. Even the women folks tried it—just out of curiosity, I reckon. Some of 'em didn't seem to take to it, and there was others that looked the other way when the coons was filling their glasses, and forgot to say: "Not any more, thanks."

After supper it was sure a gay crowd. It wasn't only champagne that old Bill had laid in a supply of; there was other brands not quite so aristocratic, maybe, but a heap more familiar to the male revelers. I will say—and I say it with sorrow—that it got to be a wild old party, along toward the last.

Some of 'em got tired of dancing after awhile—and what do you think they done? They went into the dining-room and turned the tables outdoors, and they didn't do a thing but take that checker-board floor and have a game of human checkers. I'll gamble you never seen that kind of game. The way they done it, one fellow took all ladies, and the other took men, and stood 'em on the black squares, and numbered 'em all. And I'll be hanged if they didn't play a pretty nifty game with 'em, too. It was sure novel to watch 'em.

Along about five o'clock the orchestra struck, and said the union wouldn't stand for their playing any longer. But the crowd wouldn't have it that way. They coaxed, and old Bill tried to bribe 'em, but they hung out for union hours. Finally Ellis and me led 'em out to the kitchen and rustled a few different brands; and after that they was dead willing to play as long as the crowd could stand it to dance—which they did till after nine o'clock in the forenoon. Oh, it was sure a success—that dance.

When the crowd and the cooks and

the orchestra had all gone, old Bill helped us feed the stock and told us to get to bed, kinda fatherly—different from the way he'd been for the last two months. We felt it, in a kind of a way, but we was too dog-tired to pay much attention, and rolled in, thankful for the feel of a pillow under our heads.

When we come alive, about sundown, old Bill was setting in his old armchair, with his feet stuck up on the back of the old cook-stove, smoking his pipe and looking up at the calendar over the table. Ellis and me looked at each other kinda doubtful, as if maybe the Hall of Mirth was a dream. I went so far as to open the door and take a look up the hill. There she stood, dismal and still, with Chinese lanterns strung around her, and her sign staring down the road, kinda thoughtful and gloomy. I shut the door and looked at old Bill, and at Ellis.

Then old Bill took his eyes from the calendar and looked at us a minute, and waved his pipe toward the picture. "Boys," he said, "I started out to give a swell dance, and to open

Bent Willow's eyes some. Did I cut her?"

"You sure did, old-timer," says Ellis and me both at once.

He sighed, kind of relieved, and felt in his pants pockets, kinda meditative. Then he took out a ten-dollar bill and smoothed it thoughtful on his knee, and held it up. "Boys," he grinned, "there's the last uh that ten thousand. But I sure had a run for my money!" He leaned over and stuck it in the stove, lit his pipe with it, and set back and went to smoking. Ellis and me went out, quiet, and took another look at the Hall of Mirth. We didn't say much, though.

When we went back, old Bill took down his feet and straightened up brisk, like he always done when there was something to do. "Boys," he said, "we got the Hall of Mirth, and she's a peach, if I do say it. They's no use letting it stand there empty. Roll up your beds, and we'll move up into it right off."

"What—*live* in it?" asks Ellis, kinda stunned.

"Sure," says old Bill. And we moved in that night.



DIAMONDS MADE AT HOME

WOULD you like to know how to manufacture diamonds—real diamonds? The process is somewhat difficult, requiring time, patience, and some outlay of money. But then, consider the possible results!

The diamond, you know, is simply carbon in a transparent crystalline form. It comes of humble parentage, and is brother to the piece of coal. Unlike easily crystallizable bodies, carbon is insoluble in all ordinary solvents, but molten metals will combine with it.

Let the diamond-maker choose iron for a solvent for charcoal, melting it in an electric furnace, allowing it to take up as much carbon as it can—in other words, saturate itself with carbon. The crucible containing the white-hot metal should then be plunged into a bath of molten lead. The result will be that globules of iron will rise to the surface of the lead, and are quickly cooled on the outer surface. Inside the hard crust the iron remains for some time in a molten condition, and, as iron expands in solidifying, the contents of these little globules receive a pressure unattainable by any other means.

When the lead becomes solidified some bullets of iron will be found bound up in the mass. Dissolve, with a powerful acid, first the lead and then the iron, and a residue of carbonaceous matter will be found to contain tiny crystals—real diamonds.

The Adventure of the King-pin Gambler

By J. Egerton

Author of "A Mesmeric Mystery," Etc.

Tommy Williams—Mr. Egerton's unique creation—is here presented in a novel role. Stimulated by the rustling of a petticoat, he takes issue with a notorious gambler, the proprietor of one of the most fashionable gambling establishments in New York, and finds in him an antagonist worthy his steel. It is a story of great power, and we feel confident you will pronounce it "the best yet."

(A Complete Novel)



CONTRARY to our usual custom, Mr. Tommy Williams and I were drinking our after-dinner coffee in the restaurant where we had dined instead

of going back to his studio to prepare it, and he lighted a cigarette and glanced about the room at the other guests.

"Isn't that Wakefield at the corner table?" he asked; and, looking over, I recognized the great gambler against whom Longley, our friend the assistant district attorney, was waging a relentless but, so far, unsuccessful war.

"Yes," I answered, for, although I had not patronized him in a business way, I had known him well when I was a reporter. "He doesn't look the crook and scoundrel that Longley asserts him to be, does he?"

"He might be anything with that face, but he would have risen to the top of any business or profession he had chosen," said Tommy, looking at him critically. "Longley has his work cut out if he is to win his fight against that man."

Wakefield was quietly eating his dinner alone, and there was nothing in his dress or manner to distinguish him

from the fifty other well-groomed men in the restaurant.

At first glance one might have taken him for a philanthropist, instead of one who thrived and fattened on the weaknesses of his fellow men. His white hair and mustache and blue eyes gave an impression of kindliness; but the thin, straight lips and square, aggressive chin belied the softness of the upper part of the face.

"Why don't you come to Longley's assistance, then, and use your hypnotic power on the side of law and order?" I asked banteringly, but Tommy grinned and shook his head.

"Longley can fight him alone, and I don't much care whether he wins or loses," he said. "So far as I know, he doesn't do any particular harm, except to fools who voluntarily pit themselves against him. I understand that he's a liberal patron of my profession, too, and has a collection of pictures well worth seeing. I had a note from him to-day, asking me to undertake the decoration of a room in a place he is building at Newport."

"Going to accept the commission?" I asked, smiling; but Tommy was in a serious mood.

"You know that I have given up that class of work since I have not been un-

der the necessity of making a living," he answered. "Under the ordinary conditions I don't care for it, but I have half a mind to take this on."

"It would be rather a radical departure from altar-pieces to the decoration of a temple of the Goddess of Chance," I suggested; but Tommy protested that art had no conventional scruples.

"I'd decorate a kennel, if I thought the dogs would appreciate the work," he concluded. "From all that I hear about him, this man Wakefield has a sure taste, and his love of paintings is not merely a pose. It would be interesting to know the side of the man which is not connected with his business. Finish your coffee and let's go over and speak to him."

Wakefield nodded to me and greeted Tommy warmly when I introduced him; and as they chatted together I studied his face closely. The pallor of the skin which is so characteristic of night-workers was absent, for Wakefield was a keen sportsman, and in spite of his profession spent much time on his yacht and with his gun and dogs in the field.

His eyes were surrounded with crow's-feet, but they were as bright and keen as those of a young man, although he must have been well past fifty years of age; and they looked squarely into Tommy's during the conversation.

His hands were large, with long, slender fingers, white and beautifully cared for, and his voice was low-pitched and pleasant.

There was nothing of the blatant, yellow diamond, tin-horn gambler about the man; in appearance and manner he was as polished and cultivated a gentleman as one would care to meet; and it was difficult to realize that he was even now engaged in a finish fight with the criminal authorities, and that only his wits stood between him and State's prison.

"I hope that you can undertake the work for me; I should give you an absolutely free hand," he said, after Tommy had told him that he hesitated about returning to mural decoration. "There

is no reason why you should not be perfectly frank about it, and I trust, if you have any objections to doing work for a house of that character, you will say so. I know that I am regarded as an outlaw, but I like to have beautiful things about me, and if you care to look through my New York place, you will find that your work will be in good company."

Tommy readily accepted the invitation, and Wakefield called for his bill.

"By the way, I had a curious offer made to me to-day," Wakefield said, as the waiter left to get the check. "A man whom I have known for a great many years claims to have a genuine Raphael to dispose of, and one of the best examples, too. He has offered it to me—I haven't seen it yet—and I am to meet him to-night and make an appointment. Perhaps it would interest you to examine it."

"I should doubt its genuineness," replied Tommy thoughtfully. "I don't know of any such picture on the market to-day, and, as you probably know, every important work of the old masters is as carefully catalogued and located as if it were in a museum. Is your friend a collector?"

"Hardly that," answered Wakefield dryly. "To be frank, he follows my occupation for a livelihood, and I don't think that he combines art-collecting with it; but I have an idea that he acquired this picture on the gamble that he might dispose of it to me."

"As even experts are often fooled by some of the copies and forgeries, I should hardly think him qualified to judge an old master, then," said Tommy, laughing; but Wakefield shook his head.

"Sheehan doesn't know any more about a picture than a dog does about dealing cards; but he does know enough not to try any games on me," he said grimly. "It's safe to bet that he didn't rely on his own judgment, and that he thoroughly believes in what he has to offer, or he wouldn't bring it to me. However, you will meet him if you come with me now, and you can form your own opinion of him."

We walked from the restaurant to Wakefield's place, a large house on a fashionable side street, which was his combined residence and place of business.

Longley had displayed no little ingenuity in trying to obtain evidence that gambling was carried on there, but, although it was a fact known to every man about town, Longley had failed to obtain legal proof of it. His spies had never succeeded in passing the heavy front door, which now opened readily enough to the master's ring, although it closed with suspicious suddenness behind us.

I was conscious that we were under observation from within during our momentary pause in the outer vestibule; but there was nothing to suggest other than a luxurious private house about the entrance-hall, where a smiling negro took our coats and hats.

"Has Mr. Sheehan been in this evening, Sam?" asked Wakefield; and when the negro answered that he had not, the gambler suggested that we look through the house under his guidance.

No expense had been spared in its furnishing and decoration, and as we passed through room after room, each representing a small fortune in the rare paintings which hung on the walls, the marbles in the corners, and the exquisite pieces of porcelain in the cabinets, it seemed incredible that all of this priceless collection had been paid for by the money which fools lost at the gambling-table; and that Wakefield, its owner, had never done an honest day's work in his life.

The man himself, courtly in his manner, suave, and evidently genuine in his appreciation and love for the beautiful things he had gathered together, showed no evidence that he was, at heart, as Longley asserted, a cold, remorseless, unscrupulous sharper. The house, until we reached the top story, gave no evidence of being used for gambling purposes; a reception-room at the front and a large dining-room, with several small tables set with handsome glass, silver, and linen, occupied the first floor; the second was given up

to Wakefield's private apartments, and in the third were situated two large public gambling-rooms and a half-dozen smaller ones for those players who did not care to be seen by the other frequenters of the place.

The whole house was in perfect taste; heavy, Oriental rugs of great value covered the polished floors, and deadened the sound of footsteps; and the illumination was so carefully subdued that it was restful, although each painting and piece of statuary was lighted so that it showed to the best advantage.

Wakefield paid no attention to the roulette and faro-tables in the public gambling-rooms, but pointed out the frescoes which decorated the high, domed ceilings above them, the work of one of the cleverest American decorators.

It was too early for the crowd, and the sharp-eyed, pallid-faced croupiers were idly spinning the wheels or fingering the chips, for which there were, as yet, no purchasers.

One of the faro-tables had a few players about it, and four men were engaged in bridge at a corner table; but all were as decorously quiet as in a private drawing-room, and the well-trained, liveried negro servants stood about, alert to gratify the slightest wish of the guests.

"Mr. Sheehan has just come in, sir," said one of them; and at Wakefield's suggestion we went to his private sitting-room, and he sent for Sheehan to meet us there.

"Well, how's the picture market, Mike?" he asked, smiling, after he had introduced us.

The newcomer, a shrewd-faced, clean-shaven chap, powerfully built, and looking like a prize-fighter in spite of his immaculate evening clothes, looked at Wakefield with twinkling eyes. "I've got a corner on Raphaels just now," he said. "Of course these little gewgaws you've got here are well enough in their way, but I've got something that'll make 'em look like a dirty deuce in a clean deck. If you've got fifty thousand that isn't working, perhaps you'd like to own it."

"Suppose you send it up here and let us have a look at it," replied Wakefield, who had raised his eyebrows a trifle at the mention of the price; but Sheehan shook his head.

"You're foxy, all right, Wakefield, and you're putting up a good bluff; but Longley'll get you yet," he answered. "I've been playing in hard luck for the last year, and I'm not taking any chances until it turns. Do you think I'm going to bring my most valuable asset here and have it tied up by the police if the joint is pulled?"

All mildness disappeared from Wakefield's expression for an instant, and he gave an exclamation which might have meant either impatience or anger, but he quickly regained his self-control.

"I'm not going to bother to look at it in a gloomy safe-deposit vault," he said indifferently. "It would be perfectly secure here, but if you don't care to bring it, we will call the deal off."

"Suppose you compromise and bring it to my studio to-morrow afternoon," suggested Tommy. "I confess that I am curious to see it, but I agree with Mr. Wakefield that it should be shown under the proper conditions of light to be appreciated. What is the subject, Mr. Sheehan?"

"It's a 'Madonna and Child,' and it's a peach," replied Sheehan enthusiastically. "I don't claim to be a sharp on chromos, but a blind man could see that this is all wool and a yard wide, and if I had Wakefield's pull with Tammany, I'd keep it for myself, but I need the money. Where is this picture factory of yours?"

Tommy handed him a card, and Sheehan promised to have the picture there the following afternoon.

"From Mr. Sheehan's appearance and conversation, I should hardly judge him to be a connoisseur in art matters," remarked Tommy, after we had left the house. "I expect that he is either a rogue or a dupe in this transaction, for I know of no such picture that could possibly be on the market. Do you know anything about the man?"

"About as much as every newspaper man knows," I answered. "He is one

of the itinerant members of the fraternity, and has run gambling-houses pretty much all over the world, but he never manages to accumulate much money, for he always loses at some other gambling-table all that he wins at his own. It's quite possible that he has taken this picture in settlement of a gambling debt, for I have known of crown jewels coming into the hands of the fraternity in that way. I expect that Longley could give you his full history, for he's devoting all his energies to the gamblers just now."

"We would be apt to find him at the Lambs Club at this time," remarked Tommy, who, I realized, was becoming seriously interested. "Let's drop in there, on the off-chance."

The prediction was verified, for Longley was at one of the small tables, a mug of ale and an English mutton-chop before him. He gave an exclamation of surprise when we told him how we had spent our evening.

"This is all the dinner I get, because I remained at the office to try to devise a scheme to get my men into Wakefield's place, and you two fellows walk in there quietly, and could furnish enough evidence to send him up the river, if you would let me put you on the stand," he grumbled.

"Rather a poor return for his hospitality, that would be, don't you think?" said Tommy, smiling. "I don't believe he's as black as he's painted, and I suppose he is square, according to his own lights."

"Now, Mr. Williams, let me set you right on this whole question, and I'm stating what I positively know; not what I suspect," replied Longley seriously. "I don't suppose that you would be foolish enough to go up against a game, but if you are tempted, I can assure you that such a thing as a 'square' professional gambler does not exist. I'll admit that in places like Wakefield's the chances in favor of the house may be confined to the recognized percentage in the public rooms, for there are too many men who are up to the tricks of the game playing there to make it safe to try crooked work. But

the big play goes on in the private rooms, and Wakefield has men in his employ who are notorious for their skill in crooked manipulation. I don't care how much the man's courtliness and kindliness of manner may impress you, I tell you that he is as crooked and unscrupulous as any sharper in the lower class dives; and it's only because he does not have to run their risks that I haven't landed him. One night of successful cheating and knavery at the stakes which are played for there means a tremendous profit; and he doesn't have to repeat it often. Men of the class which he plunders don't dare to squeal about it for fear of bringing ridicule and disgrace upon themselves; but I could tell you of more than one case of misappropriation and embezzlement that our office has dealt with, which had its inception in losses incurred in that gilded hell of his."

"And yet, with all the machinery of justice that you control, you can't prove your assertions," argued Tommy incredulously. "Isn't your desire for a spectacular conviction influencing your judgment of the man?"

"Wait until I really get at him, and I'll show you!" said Longley savagely. "The man escapes me only because the very victims he plunders don't dare to go on the stand and tell what they know; and if I tried to force them, they would plead their constitutional immunity. It's a little sickening to me to see men who hold high places in the community, positions of trust and prominence in the business world, and are liberal supporters of the churches, recognize that scoundrel."

"I wonder if that's a back-hander at us!" said Tommy, looking at me in mock consternation. "Come, Longley, don't be narrow; drop in at my studio to-morrow afternoon, and I'll introduce you to him. I guarantee that you'll find him charming."

"Mr. Williams, I convicted a man of larceny this morning, and he got five years in Sing Sing," he said, a little stiffly. "A poor, ragged, half-starved degenerate, who stole money from a drunken sailor; but I'd rather walk up

Fifth Avenue with him than to soil my hand by taking that of Wakefield."

"Wouldn't even the pleasure of meeting Mike Sheehan induce you to come?" asked Tommy banteringly; and Longley threw up his hands in despair.

"What are you up to, Williams?" he asked. "If you are making a study of gamblers, I haven't anything more to say, but Mike has promised me to be good while he is in New York."

"Then a gambler's word is to be trusted, is it?" asked Tommy; and Longley laughed.

"When it's distinctly to his advantage to keep it—yes. If you are looking for contrasts in the fraternity, you have found them, for those two men are as opposite as the poles. Sheehan is of the rough-and-ready variety, shrewd and unscrupulous, as they all are, but he would only take an opportunity which offered to get the advantage of you, while Wakefield would plot and scheme for years to get you in his toils. If they had been honest men, the one might have been a good soldier and the other a skilful diplomat. When I started my crusade against the gamblers, the weaklings immediately ran to cover, and Wakefield and two or three others were defiant. Sheehan had just come back from Europe, and he voluntarily came to see me, and asked to be let alone.

"I'll not try to open up without permission," he said. "I'm not going up against a full hand with a pair of deuces, and I know when it's time to lay down; but I don't want your 'bulls' chasing me around and trying to shake me down, just because they know I'm a gambler and can't raise a holler."

"I promised him protection on his own terms; and I've brought the others, with the exception of Wakefield, to my terms, and I'll land him yet. But I'm a little particular about the company I keep, so I don't think I'll attend your pink-tea at the studio."

"You might give that detective-sergeant of yours a hint that he's apt to be contaminated by coming there," said Tommy, smiling. "Ever since I did the

work, and he reaped the glory in that hat-pin murder mystery, he's haunted the place whenever he had anything on hand."

"Poor Clancy! he's like all the rest of them," said Longley. "They are a remarkably shrewd lot when they are dealing with the crimes of the ordinary professionals, but they are at sea when it comes to anything out of the classification they have learned by routine. What is he bothering you about now?"

"Oh, a mysterious disappearance case, I believe it is," answered Tommy indifferently. "Some rich young chap that's run off or gone into hiding."

"Or been knocked on the head, or thrown in the river," said Longley seriously. "I suppose it's young Stuke he wants you to locate for him."

"I believe that is the poetical name he mentioned," answered Tommy, grinning. "Are you interested in him, too?"

"Decidedly so, because I shouldn't be surprised to learn that some of your new-found friends could tell you what has become of him, if they would," said Longley. "A half-million dollars in cold cash would buy a lot of paintings, you know, and that's the amount which has disappeared with young Stuke."

"I believe that Clancy said that big money was involved, but I didn't suppose it was anything like that amount," replied Tommy alertly. "It's getting interesting—suppose you tell us about it?"

"I will—in confidence, for the family does not wish any publicity," said Longley, after he had lighted a cigar. "It is a case which wouldn't come to the district attorney's office, as a rule, for there is, as yet, no evidence that a crime has been committed. It was referred to me from headquarters because the boy had been mixed up more or less with the kind of men I am after just now; but here are the facts, and you can judge for yourself."

"A good many years ago, an Englishman named Stuke started a small plug-tobacco factory in a Western State. The business prospered on conservative lines, and he accumulated a

snug little property, which his son by an American wife inherited along with the business. The son, being half-Yankee and American born, used the property to advertise and extend the business, and, if you have traveled much in the West, you will remember that you were constantly advised from all the prominent points in the scenery to 'Chew Stuke's Honey-Dew Plug,' or assured that 'Stuke's Early Rose Cut Plug is the Smoker's Delight.'

"Either from the excellence of the product or the extensive advertising, or both, the business grew tremendously, and Stukeville, where the factory was situated, became an important town, with the Stuke family as the local nabobs. The owner, following the customs of American business men, as well as their methods, did the work of four men, and accordingly wore out early, dying about five years ago, leaving a widow, a son of sixteen, and a daughter two years older, whom he had barely taken time from his business to become acquainted with. By his will the widow was to receive a very large income, the children each to get a quarter of a million when coming of age, and the bulk of their inheritance when the boy reached twenty-five years."

"Shortly after the father's death, the Tobacco Trust made a big offer for the business, and it was accepted; the payment being part in cash, part in stock, and a half-million in scrip, redeemable either in stock at par or cash, payable in five years. This latter was left in a safe-deposit box in New York, together with other securities; and when the boy, William, came of age about two months ago, he arrived in New York with authorization to sell the scrip and retain one-half of the proceeds; the rest to be invested for the benefit of his sister, Rachael, under the provisions of the will. He insisted upon taking cash in payment, and received the money in bills of large denominations."

"He was putting up at the Waldorf; and the hotel people, who are accustomed to the eccentricities of young millionaires from the woolly West, paid little attention to the fact that he slept

most of the day and was out most of the night; but when he was continuously absent from the hotel for three days, they quietly notified the police and his relatives. He had left the hotel after dining alone and putting several cocktails and a quart of champagne under his belt; and from that evening all trace of him and the money has been absolutely lost."

"What makes you suspicious that the gamblers have anything to do with his disappearance—aside from your prejudices?" asked Tommy; and Longley smiled as he knocked the ash from his cigar.

"Half a million is a considerable sum, Mr. Williams," he answered. "An honest man would consider it worth working for, and criminals would exercise their ingenuity, and not hesitate at murder to get hold of it. Every professional gambler I place in the latter category, and, as I told you, this boy was previously mixed up with them. To understand the circumstances, you should know the family and its surroundings. The widow is an easy-going, placid, stout old lady, who has lived all of her life in Stukeville, where by the wildest extravagance she could not spend fifteen thousand dollars a year, which is a small proportion of her present income. She has always been free from financial worries, and the possession of a large income has not changed her in the least, nor roused social ambition in her breast. She is fond of her own comforts, and believes in taking life easily, and indulges the children in every whim. The girl is handsome, well educated, and not spoiled nor made self-conscious by the fortune; but the boy, so far as I can learn, turned out just about the way one would expect from his bringing up. He was by far the most important personage in his native town, but he ran wild without other than a good-natured maternal supervision during the most critical period of his life.

"With his pockets full of money, he attracted a swarm of parasites who flattered him and fattened on him, but it was not until last winter that he fell

into really dangerous hands. The doctors ordered Mrs. Stuke to the Hot Springs of Arkansas; and she took the children with her, to remain for two months. There may be tougher places on earth than that health-resort, but if there are, I don't know of 'em; and young Stuke cut a wide swath. Gambling is the principal amusement there; the places run wide open; and the boy soon mastered the simple game of roulette, and proceeded to drop his loose change, which would be a fair income for a hard-working professional man, into the tills of the gambling-houses.

"When he was cleaned out his mother indulgently supplied him with more without asking too many questions, and finally he formed an intimacy with a good-looking, plausible chap named Ralph D'Armenthal, the black sheep of one of the oldest families in New Orleans, who has lived by his wits in New York and the fashionable watering-places for nearly ten years. D'Armenthal acted as guide, philosopher, and friend to the youngster, and I imagine—for the people are a little reticent on this point—tried to annex part of the Stuke fortune by marrying the daughter, but that didn't come off, and, after a grand flare-up, in which she lectured her brother very severely, the family cut short their stay and returned home."

"And was the Stuke fortune impaired by the boy's indiscretions?" asked Tommy.

"No, there is an unusual ending to a gambling experience," acknowledged Longley. "He lost steadily at first—about twelve thousand in all, I believe—but after D'Armenthal took him in tow he won several times; small amounts each evening until the last session before they left, when in three hours of play he hit the Southern Club for over twenty thousand. There was loud lamentation among the gamblers when he was torn away from them, and the boy reproached his sister for being the cause of their departure, and informed her that if they stayed a week longer he would break every gambling-

house in town, as he had discovered an infallible system."

"It was high time to remove him, then," said Tommy, laughing. "I believe that 'systems' account for about fifty per cent. of the dividends at Monte Carlo. What became of D'Armen-thal?"

"He soon returned to New York, and has been here, more or less, ever since, but I can't connect him in any way with the boy's disappearance. Two days before Stuke arrived here he went to Palm Beach, and did not leave there for two weeks after the boy was lost sight of. He's here now, and professes absolute ignorance of Stuke's movements or whereabouts. He is living his old life; frequenting the best hotels and restaurants; and the police assert that in reality he is a 'puller-in' for Wakefield. There are dozens of his type about; well-dressed young fellows of good address who have no visible means of support, and whose real business it is to make the acquaintance of strangers in the city, and introduce them to the gambling-houses; but his family connections and pleasant personality make him the most desirable; so, naturally, he would be employed by the king-pin of the lot."

"Isn't it strange that he should have been allowed leave of absence with such a particularly well-feathered pigeon about to arrive, if the gambling fraternity were plotting to get the picking of it?" asked Tommy.

"Yes, I was surprised at the man's alibi, which, by the way, is a perfect one," admitted Longley reluctantly. "But the boy needed no introduction; gamblers and their hangers-on are a migratory lot; and there were plenty of his other Hot Springs acquaintances here."

"But so far you haven't demonstrated any communication with the gamblers after he reached New York, as I understand it," objected Tommy.

"Only this much," replied Longley thoughtfully. "He arrived in New York at four o'clock in the afternoon, too late to transact any business. The first evening—this was before he sold

the scrip—he visited 'Honest John's,' and played a little roulette for modest stakes. He was about five hundred ahead when my men also visited the place, for that was the night I started my raids. By the way, there is an example of your 'square' gambler, or one who had the name of it; but I found enough crooked gambling apparatus in his place to disprove his sobriquet. The police arrested only the men connected with the place, and let the players go after taking their names. Stuke, of course, gave an assumed one, but 'Honest John' admitted to me that he was there and playing his system. I don't know how closely you have followed my fight against the gambling-houses; but that night we raided two other places, and the next day all the others went out of business, with the exception of Wakefield, Frawley, and Oppenheim. I landed the two last within the week, so at the time of the disappearance of young Stuke your friend Wakefield was the only gambler publicly doing business."

"And, therefore, he kidnaped or sandbagged the amiable young gentleman with the poetical name, and pocketed the half-million," said Tommy, with an aggravating grin. "After meeting the urbane gentleman, I can't believe it, Longley, and I'll wager that you'll never write 'Q. E. D.' after that proposition."

"I wish that you would become interested enough to disprove it by producing Stuke, then," said Longley irritably; but Tommy protested.

"No, you don't, old chap!" he said. "It doesn't sound good enough. Remember that there was a woman in each of the other cases when I helped you; but I don't detect even the rustle of a petticoat in this one. Beauty in distress, or a dead one to be avenged, might tempt me to neglect my work; but the disappearance of a young man named Stuke appeals to neither my chivalry nor imagination."

Longley started to grumble as we rose from the table, but checked himself, and grinned when we said good night.

II.

Duck Sing, Tommy's Chinese servant, served our luncheon at the studio the following day; and Tommy was just preparing coffee under the picturesque Arab tent in the corner when Wakefield arrived. The studio, in which Tommy had gathered so many beautiful things, in the garish light of the great northern skylight, lost all of the weird character which distinguished it at night, but it was always an attractive room; and Wakefield glanced about with an appreciative eye.

"Have a cup of coffee, Mr. Wakefield, and then I'll exhibit my treasures," said Tommy; and when the gambler sat down with us they entered into a discussion of the relative merits of a Corot, which we had seen the night before, and one which hung on the studio wall.

No stranger who might have listened would have guessed that Wakefield was anything but an educated and cultivated lover of paintings, but Sheehan, when he arrived shortly afterward, followed by two porters carrying a large box; was unmistakably the shrewd bargainer with wares to dispose of.

Tommy and Wakefield both uttered exclamations of surprise when the men unscrewed the box cover and lifted out the picture; and, after it had been placed on the easel, they gazed at it for some time without speaking.

"Now, gents, what do you think of it?" asked Sheehan triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you that I had something bang-up?"

"It's a wonderful picture, Mr. Sheehan," answered Tommy quietly; and I knew that Sheehan's manner and tone offended him. "It seems almost a sacrilege to ask for proofs of its authenticity, but I suppose that you can furnish them."

"By the yard, if it's necessary, but don't it speak for itself, Williams?" said Sheehan; and it seemed to me that there was a trace of anxiety in his voice, in spite of the assurance of his manner.

"To me it does, but then I'm not a

prospective purchaser, Mr. Sheehan," replied Tommy, with just a shade of accent on the "mister." "I believe that you set a price on it last night, and I'm frank to say that it is worth all of that, even if it can't be authenticated as a Raphael; for it is undoubtedly the work of a great artist; but you know that the origin of a picture of this class must be like the virtue of Cæsar's wife."

"I don't know anything about whether Mrs. Cæsar's straight or not, not knowing the lady; but I'll bet my pile that there's nothing phoney about this painting," answered Sheehan positively. "Ain't you enough of a sharp to tell that it's the real thing?"

"I've told you that personally I am satisfied, but I doubt if my unsupported opinion would be satisfactory to any one who would be willing to pay that price," answered Tommy. "What do you say, Mr. Wakefield—you are a prospective purchaser?"

Wakefield, who had taken no part in the conversation, so eagerly was he examining the painting, turned with a start of surprise.

"Oh, of course I should want the opinion of recognized authorities, but I feel reasonably sure of what their verdict would be, and it's only a matter of form," he said confidently. "I agree with you, Mr. Williams; the intrinsic value of the picture is, at least, fifty thousand, and, if it can be authenticated, it is worth more."

"Yes, about four times that," said Tommy dryly; and Wakefield looked at him with quick suspicion.

"Well, what's the use of chewing the rag about it any longer, then?" asked Sheehan hastily. "You say that it's worth that as it stands, so you can't lose. Give me fifty thousand, Wakefield, and she's yours. If you want a lot of certificates, and they make it out worth more, why, you win. I need the money, and I'm satisfied to let you have the best of the odds."

"Yes, I'll give you fifty thousand for it," said Wakefield. "At that price you can deliver it at my house as soon as you want to."

"You're on!" said Sheehan quickly;

and there was a note of relief in his voice. "It's a cold-cash proposition, though, Phil; markers don't go."

"I guess that I'm good for that amount," answered Wakefield, smiling. "You deliver the picture, and I'll hand over the cash. And now, Mr. Williams, many thanks for your kindness. I'll drop in another time, if I may, and look about your studio, and I trust that you will decide to accept my little commission at Newport. Going my way, Mike?"

"I should prefer to have Mr. Sheehan remain here to box up his property—or yours," said Tommy, laughing. "I don't quite like to assume the responsibility of it, for you know a master piece like that would be a great temptation to a lover of paintings, and I might yield."

He walked to the door with Wakefield, who paid no attention to his remark, and when he closed it after the gambler, I was surprised to see him lock it and put the key in his pocket. There was a marked change in his manner when he came back and lighted a cigarette.

"Now, Sheehan, where did you get hold of this painting?" he asked sharply; and Sheehan looked at him in astonishment.

"I don't know that it's any of your damn business," he said defiantly. "You're not buying it; Wakefield is satisfied with his bargain, and there's no call for you to butt in and upset it."

"Yes, I think he might be well satisfied, if he were sure of becoming the legal owner," said Tommy quietly, as he blew a cloud of cigarette smoke from his lips. "Twenty-eight years ago, when this picture disappeared, it was worth all of what he pays now, but to-day it would bring more than four times that."

Sheehan looked at Tommy in consternation, for he knew that he was beaten.

"How much do you want not to squeal?" he asked, going directly to the point; and I was surprised when Tommy, instead of knocking him down, answered quietly:

"Fifty thousand dollars, in the identical money which Wakefield pays to you."

"The devil you do!" Sheehan exclaimed. "Say, sonny, did any one ever accuse you of lack of nerve?"

"No," answered Tommy, smiling; "but I believe that you acknowledged to Mr. Longley that you didn't have enough to go up against a full hand with a pair of deuces; and, as I happen to hold that now, you'd better throw down your cards. Ten years is, I believe, the punishment for having stolen property in your possession, knowing it to have been stolen; and you know as well as I do that this picture, which is an absolutely authenticated Raphael, is stolen. It was taken from Mayhew & Son's gallery in Bond Street, London, about twenty-eight years ago, and has never been heard of since."

"Well, I'm—I'm——" Sheehan broke off hopelessly. "Say, what are you, anyway; one of Longley's bulls?" he demanded.

"That's twice you have made a wrong diagnosis," replied Tommy, laughing. "A few minutes since you mistook me for a crook, but I'm neither the one nor the other. I'll be perfectly frank with you, Sheehan, and I promise you this: if you do exactly as I tell you, I'll not interfere to protect Wakefield in any way. He knows what he is about, and that the picture is stolen as well as we do, but I should not advise you to let on. I want the identical money which he pays you, and I want you to insist upon having it in large bills; nothing under five hundred."

"And where do I come in on all this?" asked Sheehan angrily. "I stick Wakefield and make an enemy of the most dangerous man in the business; he gets the picture, you get the scads, and what do I get?"

"You get ten years, if you are not careful to do exactly as I tell you," said Tommy sternly. "Don't make any mistake, and don't look for mercy if you play me false. I hold the whip-hand, and I want that money, but I don't want to keep the dirty stuff. When I'm through with it—and I promise you

it won't be long—you can have your fifty thousand, and your freedom to enjoy it. If you accept my conditions, well and good; I'll act fairly. If you don't, I cable to Mayhew & Son, telephone to police headquarters, and let you make such explanations as you see fit to the inspector."

"You win!" said Sheehan, after a moment's consideration. "There's no use going up against a sure thing, but if you're putting up any game to get Wakefield in trouble, I'd rather take five thousand and skip right now than to stand in with you."

"You might have the fifty thousand, but I want to be reasonably sure that you don't skip," said Tommy grimly; but a look of terror came to Sheehan's eyes.

"I can have heaps more fun with five thousand alive than with ten times that and a bowie-knife between my ribs," he said. "Look to yourself, Mr. Williams, if you're stacking up against this man Wakefield."

"I shall not play unless I hold the best hand," said Tommy quietly. "Now, Sheehan, it's to your interest to play fair with me. I *am* looking for Wakefield's scalp, but I shall not try to take it unless I am sure that I can put him where he'll never harm any one. I'll promise you that you will receive protection against him and immunity in this picture deal if you obey orders; and if you can get fifty thousand of his money, I guess its dirtiness won't bother you any. If you drop the slightest hint to him or try any trickery, the very least that will happen to you is ten years' imprisonment, for, as the police say, 'you're caught with the goods on,' and gentlemen of your calling are not in good standing just now. Now, you can box up your stolen property and get out, but you bring that money here to-night, or you will be started on the road for Sing Sing before breakfast."

"And now, Tommy, will you kindly explain the meaning of this performance to me?" I asked, when Sheehan had obeyed his injunctions and de-

parted. "Last night you were protesting Wakefield's virtue, and now you are taking the war-path against him."

Tommy looked at me with a Mephistophelean grin, and handed me a letter. "Read that, and perhaps you will guess why I have become interested in the case of William Stuke," he said. "Longley is more foxy than I gave him credit for." The note was on the official paper of the district attorney's office, and read:

MY DEAR MR. WILLIAMS: It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you Miss Rachael Stuke, who wishes to have her portrait painted. Miss Stuke will present this letter in person, and anything which you can do for her, in any way, will be gratefully appreciated by,

Yours very sincerely,

ALBERT J. LONGLEY.

P. S. If you should become interested in that disappearance case of which we spoke last night, your old friend Clancy is at your disposal.

A. J. L.

"The rustle of the petticoat becomes audible," I said, laughing, as I handed back the letter; and Tommy nodded.

"She's a very interesting young woman," he said. "Pretty, full of fun, and extremely intelligent. I anticipate a very pleasant time doing her portrait, and incidentally I shall try to serve her by finding her scapegrace brother."

"Poetical name, as you remarked; but then she is lucky—she can change hers," I insinuated; but Tommy laughed.

"Not any of that, old chap," he protested. "This is entirely platonic, and I'm cut out for bachelorhood." But there was something in his eye which made me doubtful. "Miss Stuke is coming here again to-morrow morning, and I'll introduce you, but here is what I learned from her in addition to what Longley told us. She isn't laboring under any sisterly delusion about her brother's character—she knew everything about him and his habits. She admits that he was not a genius, and that he was weak and easily influenced by others, but claims that a naturally sweet and generous disposition was spoiled by the possession of too much money and the gang that gathered about him to plunder him."

"Was gambling his only weakness?" I asked; and Tommy looked at me significantly.

"No, he drank more than was good for him, but there is no woman in the case," he said. "The boy had a most exaggerated idea of the importance of his position, and was afraid of women; thought that every girl who said a pleasant word to him was trying to marry him for his money. The other kind—well, I didn't ask any questions, but his sister gave me to understand that he was a pretty decent sort of a chap, and they never had anything to complain of in that way. She is firmly convinced that he has fallen into the hands of a gang of sharpers; and the curious connection of D'Armenthal with the case strengthens her in that belief. She seems to believe that that scallywag was honestly in love with her and not fortune-hunting; and it appears that it was his warning which caused their abrupt departure from the Hot Springs. He did not propose to her, but frankly confessed that her brother was in danger, that he (D'Armenthal) was mixed up in a scheme to pluck the boy, and advised her to remove him as soon as possible. He insinuated that he was overcome by remorse; that he could do nothing to harm any one belonging to her; that he was unworthy to touch the hem of her garment, and all that sort of melodramatic rot, said a tearful farewell, and vanished."

"Was the young lady impressed by it?" I asked.

"I suppose so, for she is charmingly human, and it was flattering," he replied. "She did not tell me so, but, at any rate, she was impressed by the sincerity of his warning about her brother's danger, and insisted upon taking him away."

"And what theory have you formed, now that you are in possession of the facts and a woman has entered into the case?" I asked; and Tommy smiled as he looked at me.

"When you see her, you will understand how difficult it would be for any man to refuse to do her a service, and

I confess that I have already committed myself and formed a tentative theory," he answered. "In the first place, my talk with Longley was all bosh; I was simply badgering him for the sake of argument, for I know that the professional gambler is a crook and a thief. One look about Wakefield's place would convince the most skeptical, for that house and its contents represent over a million of investment, and the expense of running it must be enormous. No legitimate small percentage on even a very large volume of play would justify it, and you had absolute proof of the man's dishonesty here to-day, for he knew as well as I did that he was buying stolen property. Sheehan, in his ignorance, counted upon the theft being so old that it would be forgotten, and I dare say had prepared some trumpery yarn about its having been found in a garret to explain its origin. But Wakefield knew the picture, which is listed and reproduced in all catalogues of Raphael's works, and bought it with his eyes open."

"He takes rather a serious risk of loss if he has to give it up after paying Sheehan," I said doubtfully, but Tommy shook his head.

"He doesn't run any risk of that, but I'm surprised that he made the purchase in our presence," replied Tommy thoughtfully. "I can only explain it on the supposition that he has the mania of collecting which has led many honest men to commit extraordinary crimes. He may have been afraid that I would take it if he did not, and, in any case, he doesn't run any financial risk. That picture was practically sold to the National Gallery for ten thousand guineas when it was stolen, but that was twenty-eight years ago, and, owing to the tremendous advance in value of authentic pictures by the old masters, it would bring a quarter of a million dollars to-day. Mayhew & Son would be only too glad to reimburse Wakefield to regain possession of the picture, but he, if I am correct in my judgment of the man's collecting mania, would prefer to retain it, even if he has to enjoy it in secret. He is a curi-

ous character, and I think we shall have some interesting experiences before we have finished with him."

"But, Tommy, that's a tremendous sum for a man to pay for a picture which he will not dare to show to any one," I objected.

He shrugged his shoulders as he lighted a fresh cigarette. "Yes, but it's only ten per cent. of the amount which has disappeared with young Stuke," he said significantly. "When Wakefield bought that picture to-day it strengthened my suspicions that he got that. Ordinarily, you would suppose that he would not be very flush just now. Longley hasn't succeeded in getting evidence to arrest him, nor even to close his house, but all the publicity and newspaper talk has scared away the patrons. None of the heavy plungers have taken the risk of arrest by playing there, and the only probable source of a large amount of money was from young Stuke. The boy was paid his half-million at the Chemical National Bank—four hundred one-thousand-dollar bills, two hundred five-hundred-dollar bills. It was new money—gold certificates—received that day from the treasury, and the numbers are known. So far, but two of those bills have reappeared in circulation since he received them, for every bank in the country is on the lookout for them. One was changed at a San Francisco bank, and another was deposited by a book-maker in New Orleans."

"The home of D'Armenthal," I suggested; but Tommy raised his hand impatiently at the interruption.

"Now, that money, known as it is, is about as difficult to dispose of without exciting suspicion as the Raphael 'Madonna.' Bills of that size are not in ordinary circulation, and would be scrutinized carefully wherever offered. They could be traced back, and if a common source of supply for a half-dozen could be located, it would be pretty strong circumstantial evidence that the issuer knew something about young Stuke. I shall not be surprised if Sheehan receives them in payment for the picture. I have notified Clancy

to shadow him, so I'll finger that money, and if it is part of the identical currency paid to Stuke, I think that we can give Longley a little assistance in solving the mystery of the disappearance, put Wakefield out of business, and incidentally return the boy to the bosom of his sorrowing family."

"And earn the everlasting gratitude of the beautiful sister," I added. "But where does D'Armenthal come in on this?"

Tommy's expression was exceedingly Mephistophelean as he grinned at me. "So far only in my tentative theory; but I shall try hypnotism on him for a starter," he said. "The basis of the whole thing, after seeing his house and watching the purchase of the picture, is my suspicion of Wakefield. Mind you, he is no picayune piker; he has reduced the plucking of pigeons to an exact science, and it's safe to assume that he knows of every young cub in the country who is coming into a fortune. It would have been worth while to lay pipe a considerable time in advance for young Stuke, and I suspect that D'Armenthal was selected to make the opening move. I think that he was sent to Hot Springs to become intimate with the boy, and prepare the way for his inveiglement to Wakefield's place.

"The 'system' was his advice to young Stuke; one of many thousands which have been devised, and which look faultless on paper. Stuke played it and won—which was probably mere chance—and of course that gave him tremendous confidence in his adviser. But D'Armenthal, knowing that it would not stand the test of many repetitions, and wishing to reserve the boy for sacrifice by his employer when he had more money, worked on the sister's fears, and had him rescued from the Hot Springs fraternity. So far no suspicion would attach to Wakefield, for he has no interest in Hot Springs, but it would not be wise to have one of his known hangers-on mixed up with the boy in New York, so when the time arrived, he shipped D'Armenthal away, and managed with some one else."

"But what has become of the boy?"

Surely you don't think that Wakefield has done away with him, or has him locked up in his cellar, do you?"

"No," said Tommy slowly. "All he wanted was the money. I don't think that he would resort to murder, because it would be too risky, and of course he wouldn't hold him prisoner, although I imagine the walls of his house could tell of more improbable things than that. But here is one point which we have not taken up. The loss of the half-million wouldn't cripple the Stuke estate, but you will remember that half of the amount belonged to Miss Rachael, and, if her brother took it, it was straight embezzlement. Now, every system player believes that success is only a question of capital; if he has enough he can break the bank. My theory is that the boy, fearing that his own share, large as it was, might be insufficient to combat a temporary run of ill luck, 'borrowed' his sister's to make assurance doubly sure. Of course it was only borrowed; the system couldn't fail; and after breaking Wakefield it would be returned. You can guess the probable result. The system broke down, the sister's money was dipped into, and finally wiped out."

"That is a plausible theory about the money, but it doesn't account for the boy," I objected. "You don't know that he ever entered Wakefield's place, and it shows no motive for doing away with him."

"If I can prove that he went there, I shall find out what has become of him," said Tommy confidently. "The police have exhausted every possible means to trace him there without success, but if I can trace the money to Wakefield's pocket it will be proof enough. As to his disappearance, the motive is plain enough, if the other part of the theory is correct; and it does not necessarily imply foul play. Now, just as a further theory, take this. We know that the boy dined heartily, and drank more wine than was good for him, and we will suppose that afterward he started play at Wakefield's, or any place else. Of course any sum of money can be staked and lost on the

turn of a card, but he was a system player, and would divide his capital into separate wagers. No matter how crooked the game, the sharpers would have to let him win a certain proportion of his bets to encourage him, or he would become frightened and pull out; so that it probably took several hours to fleece him.

"Just imagine his condition in the gray dawn after such a night; he had lost his own inheritance and that which didn't belong to him; a mere boy with the dregs of drink in him, the excitement of play gone, and facing the realization that he was a thief! He could repay the money from his inheritance, but that would not be for four years, and in the meantime he would have to acknowledge that he was a thief, and live on the bounty of his mother. Suppose, then, that the sharpers who had fleeced him offered to get him out of the country and give him a few hundred dollars; don't you think that he would jump at the chance, believing that he could redeem himself, or, at the worst, lie quietly until the main part of his inheritance allowed him to square things?"

"Possibly," I admitted; "or he might commit suicide, or threaten exposure, and get knocked on the head to keep him quiet."

"No," said Tommy. "If he committed suicide, the chances are that he would leave letters—they always do. And remember that Wakefield would probably not appear personally in this matter. His employees would fleece him, but they would hardly go to the length of murder for their small interest in the spoils. A body is a difficult thing to dispose of, and there is absolutely no trace of one resembling his in the morgue records. Another point is the reappearance of these two bills. The one in New Orleans I can't account for, but the San Francisco one was changed by a young man answering, in a general way, the description of Stuke, one week after his disappearance. Ships go from there to the uttermost part of the world, and I have suggested to his sister that she set de-

tectives to work on that theory. In the meantime, I shall attend to the New York end of it, and as a starter I shall try to meet and dine with D'Armenthal this evening. I don't expect Sheehan before ten, and you can wait here for him or come with me, if the case interests you."

"I'll have to keep you out of trouble," I answered, laughing; "so I think I'll make one of your dinner-party."

III.

It was not difficult to locate D'Armenthal, nor to make his acquaintance after finding him. He was seated with several others in the café at the Waldorf, and two of the men whom we knew asked us to join them in an antepandrial cocktail.

An invitation for him to dine with us came quite naturally, and was readily accepted when the party broke up and Tommy sent to reserve a table.

He was a strikingly handsome man; a Creole descendant of an old French family, which had often intermarried with their Spanish neighbors in Louisiana, and he seemed to have inherited the most charming traits of both nations. He was slight and graceful of figure, with long, slender hands and feet, hair black as jet, and dark eyes shaded with long lashes which a professional beauty might have envied. The straight, long nose, delicately modeled mouth, and clear, dark skin he had inherited from his Spanish ancestors; but his wit, his vivacity of manner, and his reckless gaiety spoke plainly of France.

We knew that he was a ne'er-do-weel, disowned by his family, and following a questionable mode of livelihood, but he was a delightful dinner companion; and I secretly regretted that, if Tommy's surmise was correct, his hypnotic influence would lay bare a very black heart under that charming exterior.

I had taken such a fancy to him that I was embarrassed by, and sincerely sorry for, a painful incident which occurred near the close of the dinner.

D'Armenthal had been entertaining us with an account of some of his experiences as a student in Paris, where he was educated, and he suddenly broke off and rose from his seat to greet a lady and gentleman who entered the palm-room where we were dining.

The woman was strikingly handsome, with something about her face which dimly suggested relationship to our guest, while the man who followed her showed by certain unmistakable evidences in his dress that he was a Southerner.

D'Armenthal gave a little exclamation of pleasure and started forward to meet them, but the lady eyed him coldly from head to foot without a sign of recognition, and seemed to gather up her dress as if to avoid contact with him as she passed, while the man's greeting was confined to the curtest of nods and a frown of displeasure.

D'Armenthal's face grew crimson, and he stepped back, but it was livid white and his lips were firmly compressed when he resumed his seat after this direct cut, which had been noticed by many of the people at the adjoining tables.

Tommy made some commonplace remark to me to relieve the awkwardness of the situation; and D'Armenthal, after swallowing a glass of champagne, regained his color and shrugged his shoulders.

"You see the danger of picking up chance acquaintances, gentlemen," he said bitterly. "I suppose that most of the New Yorkers in this room know that I am a shady sort of a character, but it remained for my own flesh and blood to publicly announce what I, of course, knew—that I am not fit to come near a decent woman."

His remark did not make things easier, but Tommy rose to the occasion and laughed, saying that it undoubtedly arose from some misunderstanding which could be readily explained.

"No," said D'Armenthal savagely, a strange light in his dark eyes, "there is no misunderstanding, any more than there was anything unintentional in the cut. That lady is Madame de Villeroi

née D'Armenthal, my first cousin, and she is probably thankful at this moment that marriage has changed her name. We were brought up together, and were more like brother and sister than cousins, but you have seen how she regards me now. She is perfectly right, and I have only myself to blame; but I regret that she thought it necessary to make the slight so public."

"I don't think that any one but ourselves noticed it," I said; but D'Armenthal only smiled at my well-meant lie.

"I am sorry to have involved you gentlemen in anything so unpleasant," he said courteously. "I owe you an explanation, but I imagine you can guess most of it. It's just the old story—a young Southerner unfitted for work by inheritance, education, and climate, with a good name and a patrimony too small to maintain it. I promptly lost the one over the gambling-table: a sum no larger than many of my ancestors had squandered in an evening without losing sleep over it, but it was all I had; and the other—well, my life hasn't added glory to it, and *ma belle cousine* has every reason to cut me."

"Is it so bad that it can't be made right, Mr. D'Armenthal?" asked Tommy kindly.

Our guest shook his head. "You saw for yourself that even my own people think so," he said hopelessly. "I don't want to pose, Mr. Williams, but you have been awfully decent about it, and I'll tell you frankly that this is an awful facer for me, for latterly I have been trying to 'make it right.' I'm afraid that I'm a weak vessel, though, and an experience like this one to-night makes it harder."

"I imagine that you are stronger than you think," answered Tommy cheerfully. "Now, see here, Mr. D'Armenthal, we have an engagement for this evening which we can't break, but suppose that you dine at my studio to-morrow night, and perhaps we can help you to straighten things out."

"If you are not ashamed of my company, I shall be glad to," he answered gratefully; and we left the dining-room together.

Just as Tommy and I were about to leave him in the hallway, a man stepped up to us and spoke to him. "Mr. D'Armenthal, the old man sent me to tell you that he wants to see you this evening, without fail," he said; and D'Armenthal listened with a grim smile, but his eyes were flashing when he answered.

"Jack, don't make any mistake in my message," he said. "You can give the old man Mr. Ralph D'Armenthal's compliments, and tell him to go to the devil."

The messenger's jaw dropped, and he was speechless with astonishment as D'Armenthal walked with us to the door.

"If you knew the significance of that message, you would know that I am trying to 'make it right,'" he said; and there was a smile on his lips and a ring of sincerity in his voice. "Until to-morrow night, gentlemen, *au revoir*."

"I imagine that we do know something of the significance of that message," said Tommy, with a chuckle, as we walked away. "I recognized the messenger as one of Wakefield's croupiers, so it's fair to assume that 'the old man' is none other than the picture-buyer."

"And what do you make of the whole business?" I asked anxiously.

"You know the old saying about 'When rogues fall out,'" replied Tommy grimly. "I hope that in this particular case it will be the rogues who will get their due; the honest men can take care of themselves."

I was very much disappointed by his answer, for I hoped that he would spare D'Armenthal the ordeal of the hypnotic trance in which I had heard so many men reveal their inmost thoughts and the baseness which they ordinarily concealed. Tommy must have known what was passing in my mind, for he went on seriously, although I had made no comment:

"*'Fiat justitia,'* etc., you know, old chap. I have no wish to harm D'Armenthal; on the contrary, I'd be glad to do the poor devil a good turn if he is sincere; but, although he may be try-

ing to turn over a new leaf, I have got to know what is written on the old ones; and, unless he's mixed up in something decidedly criminal, he'll be none the worse for it. The more I look into this thing, the more dangerous the whole scheme appears, for if Wakefield can make a tool of a man like D'Armenthal, there is no limit to his power for evil. I hope that Longley can land him for a long term, and I shall help him if I find that he is mixed up in this Stuke case."

Detective-sergeant Clancy was standing at the entrance to the building in which Tommy's studio was situated, and he smiled broadly when he saw us approaching.

"Sure your bird's in the cage, safe enough, Mr. Williams!" he exclaimed. "He went as if th' devil was after him when he came from Wakefield's, an' he didn't stop for breath until he near bowled your Chink over, gettin' through your door."

"Good man, Clancy; you are improving," said Tommy as we passed in; but Clancy followed us.

"Mr. Williams, it's consumed with curiosity that I am," he said coaxingly. "Is it th' Stuke case that we're workin' on?"

"Maybe," said Tommy, laughing. "I'll promise you this, Clancy. If it is, and I locate the man responsible for his disappearance, you shall make the arrest."

"He's as good as got me cuffs on him now, then," said Clancy admiringly; and we left him grinning complacently when we climbed the stairs.

We found Sheehan nervously chewing the end of an unlighted cigar and trying to interest himself in the pictures in Tommy's studio; and he was obviously relieved by our arrival.

"Improving your art education, Sheehan?" asked Tommy banteringly; and the gambler threw his cigar-stump down viciously.

"Pictures be darned! I'm sorry I ever saw one!" he said irritably. "One of those blame headquarters bulls piped me as soon as I came out of Wake-

field's, and stuck to me like a porous-plaster until I got under cover here."

"Yes, he's waiting at the door now," remarked Tommy dryly. "What's the matter, Sheehan? Have you been found out in anything?"

"Found out? I haven't done anything," blustered the gambler. "But I know well enough I wouldn't stand a hundred-to-one chance if he shook me down with fifty thousand in my jeans."

"You got it, did you?" asked Tommy eagerly; and Sheehan nodded.

"You bet I got it, when I delivered the goods. I'm not trusting Phil Wakefield overmuch when Longley's camping on his trail as he is now. I only hope that you're not letting me in for something that'll make me wish that I'd never gone there, but here it is."

He threw a bundle of money on the table, and Tommy's eyes glistened as he saw that the bulk of it consisted of new one-thousand-dollar bills. He counted forty-seven of them, and carefully compared the numbers with a list which he took from his card-case. There was a look of satisfaction on his face when he straightened up and put them in his pocket, leaving the three thousand in smaller bills on the table.

"Any trouble about it, Sheehan?" he asked of the gambler, who had regarded his proceedings with considerable misgiving.

"No," he answered ruefully. "He gave up as easy to me as I have to you. He knew that I wanted to open up in Buenos Ayres, and he had it all ready for me in this shape—three thousand in chicken-feed, and that bunch you just pouched in yellow boys."

"I'm afraid that I shall have to ask you to postpone your opening for awhile," said Tommy coolly. "There is no extradition from the Argentine, I believe, and I want you to be on hand. Just verify the numbers on these bills, include them in a receipt stating that you obtained them from Wakefield, and I will sign it. When I am through with the money I'll return it to you on the surrender of that receipt. You can take the three thousand for current ex-

penses, but don't attempt to spend it in traveling, or I will have you in the Tombs."

Sheehan complied with ill grace, and Tommy carefully read the receipt, which he signed and handed back.

"If that bull's waiting for me, I suppose I'll have to stand for a touch out of this, too," grumbled Sheehan, as he pocketed the three thousand.

"If he tries it, tell him that I've been ahead of him, and he'll let you off," said Tommy, laughing. "It's more than you are really entitled to, Sheehan, but I'll give you the rest of it before long, if you are good. Where did you get hold of that picture?"

"I'll tell you that when you give up the forty-seven," answered the gambler, grinning. But his face grew serious as he went on: "Mr. Williams, I've played fair with you, and I believe that you'll be fair with me—are you sure that you can protect both of us if you go up against Wakefield?"

"So long as it is not in the line of his profession, I think I can get the better of him," replied Tommy confidently.

But Sheehan was evidently very much worried. "I'm no squealer, Mr. Williams; you've got me dead to rights on this picture deal, so there's no use squirming; but if you'll say the word, it's skiddoo for mine now, if I never touch another cent of the money. You don't know what you're up against, but I do, and knowing it, I'd like to duck the whole thing."

"No, you will stay here," said Tommy firmly; "but if things get too hot before I have him where he is harmless, you come to me and I'll take care of you. Don't forget my message to Clancy."

Sheehan accepted his dismissal, and Tommy turned to me seriously when he had closed the door behind the gambler.

"I have nearly ten per cent. of the Stuke money here in my pocket, so I think we know where the rest of it is," he said. "But I think that we know something else—that our friend Wakefield is a very dangerous man, for

Sheehan is no coward, and he is evidently in mortal terror of him. The first part of our theory is correct—Stuke went to Wakefield's. Remains now to find out how he left there, where he went to, and to locate him. Incidentally, I hope to nail Mr. Wakefield's hide to the fence, and, as a first step, I'll put D'Armenthal to sleep to-morrow night."

IV.

Miss Rachael Stuke proved to be quite as attractive as Tommy's description had led me to believe when I was presented to her at the studio the following morning, and, although Tommy made a pretense of blocking out a portrait, we spent most of the morning in discussing the disappearance of her brother. She seemed confident that the boy was alive; either forcibly detained or in voluntary hiding; and Tommy and I were careful not to express our fears that he had met with foul play.

She was a tall girl, blond, with light-brown hair, blue eyes, and a pink-and-white complexion; but there was nothing of the weakness about her face which was the principal characteristic I noticed in the photograph of her brother which she brought with her. She spoke of her acquaintance with D'Armenthal quite naturally and without embarrassment.

"I really believe that he could help us, if he would," she said earnestly. "I have sent word to him twice to ask him to call upon me, but either he has not received my notes or he pays absolutely no attention to them. I do wish that you would try to meet him, Mr. Williams, and persuade him to come and see me. He might speak more freely to me than he would to you."

"I imagine that he will speak frankly enough to me, if he has anything to tell," answered Tommy, with a grim smile. "Let me attend to that part of it, Miss Stuke, and I promise you that nothing will be neglected."

I saw that Tommy was not anxious to bring the two together, and as he looked at her a suspicion flashed

through my mind that he was not entirely unselfish in his motive.

"I am pinning every bit of my faith to you, so please do not think that I am interfering," she said quickly. "I know that you will have a good reason for everything you do, or refuse to do, and all that I have to guide me is your advice and a woman's intuitions. Mr. Longley warned me that you would be mysterious in your methods and an absolute dictator, if you became interested in the case at all."

There was a twinkle of mischief in her eyes, and Tommy looked at her sharply.

"It was a put-up job of Longley's, then?" he said. "I thought you came to me for a portrait."

"Oh, no, you did not!" she said frankly. "I don't know that you noticed it, Mr. Williams; but I was careful to wear a particularly 'rusty' petticoat yesterday."

"Don't shoot, I'll come down!" answered Tommy, laughing. "I'll even listen to all of your feminine intuitions, which I am sure will be valuable, if you will tell me what else Longley said."

"Oh, nothing but what was entirely complimentary," she replied demurely. "He told me that you always liked the center of the stage, which means that you are always where there is the most danger, I suppose."

I snickered audibly, and Tommy flushed a little and looked at her suspiciously.

"Yes, I suppose that's what he meant, and I'll thank him for his compliment when I have an opportunity," he said; but he was careful not to catch my eye. "And now, Miss Stuke, I suppose that you consulted the Pinkenhams, as I advised you to do."

"Yes, I carried out your suggestions absolutely. They are to make the fullest inquiries in San Francisco, and communicate with all their foreign agencies. I told them that there was no question about Billy having left New York, and that we wanted no publicity, and said nothing about the money, nor the fact that any one else

was engaged in trying to find him. They are to report directly to me."

"Good," said Tommy approvingly. "As regards D'Armenthal, leave him to me. If I think it will serve any useful purpose, I promise that he will call upon you. And now, Miss Stuke, if you are really in earnest about the portrait, will you kindly take the pose?—yes, that's right—the chin a trifle higher, please. Dinner is at seven, old chap; don't be late!"

I took the hint, and I knew that my dismissal was the result of my injudicious snicker, for Tommy is not free from human weakness.

When I arrived for dinner I was careful not to incur Tommy's further displeasure by referring to Longley's "compliment."

The studio was a dream of mysterious beauty, and I realized that its owner, who believed so thoroughly in the influence of the surroundings to augment his hypnotic power, placed great importance on that evening's séance. The mummy of the Egyptian princess peered with unseeing eyes from her dimly lighted corner; the swinging lamp cast a faint radiance on the beautiful Salammbo, with the sacred serpent coiled about her; and the masks and old weapons on the walls showed indistinctly in the shadows. The coffee tray was carefully arranged under the Arab tent, the side curtains of which were looped back; and the divans and cushions about the small table on which it stood were a direct invitation to laziness.

It was on these that D'Armenthal and I stretched out, after Duck Sing had served a perfect dinner; and we smoked our cigarettes while Tommy busied himself with preparing the coffee. D'Armenthal had been the life of the dinner, rattling on in easy and amusing conversation, but I felt that he was under a severe nervous strain, and, in spite of the self-restraint which he exercised, his hand trembled as he lighted his cigarette.

He was the first to speak after Tommy had poured the coffee, and his hesi-

tation was like that of a man nerving himself to plunge into icy water.

"I don't know whether I should have accepted your hospitality without a fuller confession after the occurrence of last night; but I don't think that you are entirely ignorant of what my life has been," he said apologetically; and Tommy nodded.

"Now, Mr. D'Armenthal, I never should have broached this subject, but you have brought it up yourself, and in a way which gives me a right to speak," he said earnestly. "I am not trying to force your confidence, but from what you said last night, I imagine that you are trying to break away from old associations and lead a different life. That is a battle which each man must fight for himself, but a little encouragement from outside is often helpful. If you voluntarily wish to tell us anything, well and good, but please don't attempt it unless you are willing to tell everything."

D'Armenthal hesitated for a moment, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"Everything—except names, Mr. Williams," he said frankly. "*Noblesse oblige*," you know, and, although I am a thorough good-for-nothing, I don't care to peach on others, and it would serve no good purpose; but I'll confess my own delinquencies without even a mental reservation."

"As you choose," answered Tommy indifferently; and D'Armenthal pushed his coffee-cup away and blew a cloud of smoke into the air.

"There is no use going into my early history," he commenced. "It was like that of my class in the South, and I received no training which fitted me for anything in particular. The breaking of a levee about completed the ruin of my family fortunes, which had been previously impaired by the Civil War, and, as I told you, I lost the little which I inherited in gambling. There was nothing left for me in the South but a life of dependence on more fortunate relatives, and I drifted to New York with the idea that I could readily find employment here. But until you have tried it, you can't conceive what

a difficult search that proved, as I had no trade, profession, or business training of any kind.

"This was eight years ago, and the small amount of money I had with me was rapidly diminishing, when, by an unlucky chance, I ran across one of my old New Orleans friends, who insisted upon my dining with him. There is one small vice I do not possess; drinking never attracted me; and my friend disposed of most of the very generous supply of wine which he ordered with the dinner, and after the cordials he was pretty well 'lit up.' You know that we Creoles are all gamblers, Mr. Williams, and after that dinner nothing would satisfy him but that we should go to a gambling-house. I honestly tried to dissuade him, and told him that I did not know of the location of one in the city—which was the truth—but that was a difficulty easily overcome, for things were running wide open at that time, and we had no difficulty in locating one. Never mind which one it was—we will just call the proprietor 'the old man'—but it was supposedly the best in town.

"It didn't take long to clean me out; for I couldn't resist the temptation to play when the chance was before me; but my friend played on with varying success, winning largely at first, and then losing heavily; so that before we left the house he had lost all the money he had with him, and given his I. O. U. for twenty thousand dollars. It was a bagatelle for him, for he had inherited a large fortune; but I was left absolutely penniless with an overdue board bill staring me in the face. I was in a pretty hopeless position, and the next day I wandered up to the hotel where my friend was stopping, resolved to sink my pride and ask for a loan sufficient to meet my board bill and then to enlist in the army, which seemed the only thing left open to me. My friend was out, but, as I turned away from the desk, I was cordially greeted by 'the old man.'

"Sorry that the luck was so much my way last night, Mr. D'Armenthal," he said courteously; but he eyed me

sharply. 'I trust that the loss does not inconvenience you?'

"My offhand assurance that it was of little consequence could not have been very convincing, for the man is a consummate physiognomist, and he was not in the least deceived.

"I am not keeping a gambling-house for my health, Mr. D'Armenthal,' he said dryly. 'It is my business to take other people's money, but I don't want to inflict hardship. Now, your friend can well afford to lose, and I shall always be glad to have you introduce men of that kind into my house; but I know that you have been unfortunate, and I should be sorry to see you suffer by this or any other introduction. It will be a favor to me if you will allow me to reimburse you for your loss of last night; and you can call it a loan or anything else you like.'

"He held out a sealed envelope, and I only wish that I had followed my first impulse, and thrown it in his face; but that board bill was pressing, the thought of enlistment was repulsive; and 'the old man' was so courteous and kindly that I yielded to temptation and took it. He hurried away before I could say a word, and I returned to my boarding-house and called for my bill. It wasn't very much, for I had chosen a modest establishment, but when I tore open the envelope, I stared at the contents in astonishment. My loss had been sixty dollars, and there it was with a paper band about it; but there was also a packet of five five-hundred-dollar bills!

"Instantly the significance of 'the old man's' words flashed on me. I, a penniless spendthrift, had brought the rich pigeon to his house to be plucked, and this was my commission! If the man had been before me at that moment I should have killed him—and the community would have been rid of its most dangerous citizen—but there was only my landlady, and her change of attitude toward me when she saw the money was most marked.

"The best front room is vacant now, sir,' she said respectfully; but I sullenly answered that I should retain my

small hall room, and paid her out of the sixty dollars.

"The rest burned in my pocket, and I walked the streets until the gambling-house should be open and I could return the money which had been offered as a bribe. When I called there I was told that the proprietor was out, but expected back shortly, and I waited for him. Perhaps you can guess what happened; the balls were spinning in the roulette-wheels, and I was idle and nervous. I threw a dollar on the color—it lost—and before I realized what I was doing I had lost eight hundred dollars!"

D'Armenthal paused, as if the rest was almost too hard to tell; but we offered no comment, and, after lighting a fresh cigarette, he continued:

"I suppose that this seems incredible to you, who haven't the fever of gambling in your blood; and I find it difficult to account for it myself. However, it was done, and when a servant told me that 'the old man' had come in, it roused me from a daze, and I realized my terrible position. He was waiting for me in his private rooms; where I have no doubt he had been all the time, like a spider waiting until the fly was hopelessly entangled; and, although he was still kindly and courteous in his manner, there was a subtle change—just enough to make me realize that the iron hand was barely concealed by the velvet glove. I had entered that house prepared to ride the high horse, but I left it like a whipped cur. Before I went out he handed me back the eight hundred I had just lost.

"I should advise you not to play, Mr. D'Armenthal,' he said significantly. 'Of course, when you introduce any of your friends here, you can make the pretense—your losses will be returned to you, and if you should win it will be deducted from your—er—honorarium.'

"There is my case in a nutshell. I left the house with the understanding that I was a stool-pigeon, a steerer, and that I was to receive a commission on business which I brought there, and—I played the part! Don't think that I

am trying to minimize the disgrace of it; I have absolutely no excuses to make; but what I did in the line of 'steering' was done in a fair way. I never induced any one to gamble, but you know the crowd of men that my life brought me in contact with. A large percentage of those from out of town were hunting a game, and I simply saw that they found it at my employer's instead of some other house; but I never took a drunken man there to be fleeced nor suggested gambling to a greenhorn.

"Our intercourse was always perfectly polite, and never on a definite business basis. I was regularly supplied with a generous income and lived easily, and seeing the thing from the inside made me lose all desire to play myself, and I rarely saw 'the old man,' and never received any definite instructions from him. Occasionally he would drop a hint that some particular man was in town, or was expected—for his secret service extends all over the country—and that I might find him a pleasant acquaintance. Things drifted on in this way until a year ago, and I had justified my position to myself by specious arguments until I was fairly well satisfied with it, when the doctor ordered me to the Hot Springs of Arkansas.

"That's a queer life out there. There are no questions asked, and all sorts and conditions of people mix in together. You can imagine that it was a change for me, and the first thing I knew I was acquainted with a half-dozen respectable women—a luxury I had not allowed myself since I had forgotten to live as became my name. Well, it happened—I believe that they call it 'falling in love'—and for a few days I honestly forgot how low down I had dropped, and became my old self.

"The girl had a brother, a good enough young cub, who was going wrong; not as I had done, if I do say it myself, but absolutely without rime or reason, for he had more money than he knew how to spend legitimately, and was getting rid of it at the gambling-tables. I took him in hand a bit, for he

was fast approaching the 'private-room' stage—if you know what that means—and suggested one of the myriads of systems to guide his playing, insisting that he should test it with small stakes until he proved it, for I knew that it would break down, and thought that it might teach him a lesson."

D'Armenthal paused again, and I had a distinctly guilty feeling that we should not allow him to tell his story ignorant of the fact that our knowledge enabled us to supply the names which he was so carefully concealing; but I said nothing, and after Tommy had poured him a fresh cup of coffee, he continued:

"Well, this went on for a week, and I really was under the delusion that I was a pretty decent sort of a chap. In family, education, and breeding I was head and shoulders above most of the men there, and I knew that the girl liked me. We rode and walked together, and were far beyond the casual acquaintance stage when a letter from 'the old man' brought me down with a dull thud. He intimated that he was glad to hear that I was combining business with pleasure, and that I had taken the cub in hand, but suggested that I keep him out of harm's way until the plum was ripe; which it wouldn't be for another year.

"That was the first time that I really appreciated my true position, and I don't quite know why I didn't blow my brains out. I went off by myself to think it over that evening, and 'the cub,' as 'the old man' called him, without my restraining influence, made a plunge with the system, and by some chance it worked, and he made a good winning. I knew that it would be the beginning of his ruination if he wasn't restrained, and it made me desperate.

"I don't know exactly what I said in the next—and the last—interview I had with the girl. I dare say that I made an unqualified fool of myself, but I know that I warned her, and the warning must have been effectual, for they cleared out the next day, bag and baggage, and I returned to New York. I fell back into the old life, but my ex-

perience and the full realization of what it meant made it distasteful, and I imagine that 'the old man' saw that something was wrong. About two months ago he suggested a trip to Florida, and I went, and while there fell in with an old friend of my father's, who offered me a chance to rehabilitate myself.

"When I came back to New York I did not go near 'the old man.' Remember, there had never been any definite agreement in so many words between us. The letter from him at Hot Springs was the nearest thing to instructions I had ever received from him. I returned soon after this present anti-gambling crusade had started, and things were very quiet in his line of business, so that I imagined that he would be just as well satisfied to have me lie low. You heard his message and my reply to it last night; well, that was the first I had heard from him since my return. I guess that Jack must have toned down my reply a bit, for to-day I received this from him, absolutely without comment, so I think he must need me pretty badly, or else is afraid that I will squeal."

He took an envelope from his pocket and showed us five one-thousand-dollar bills.

Tommy carefully scrutinized the numbers before handing them back. "Has he many men employed at that scale of salary?" he asked; and D'Armenthal shook his head.

"I think that I am the highest-priced one—a D'Armenthal comes high, you know," he said contemptuously.

"Perhaps this was for past services; something which has slipped your mind," Tommy suggested; and D'Armenthal laughed.

"I tell you that I haven't been near the house for nearly three months," he said bitterly. "I had received all that was coming to me for my honorable services, for 'the old man' pays on the nail; but for some reason he does not want me to escape him, and there must be something in the wind."

"D'Armenthal, I wish that you would tell me who his other employees are,

and how they go to work," said Tommy seriously; but the Southerner flatly refused.

"I have told you the worst about myself, and, although I have not mentioned names, you would have no difficulty in identifying 'the old man,' if you have not already done so. I shall send this money back to him to-night, and then our connection is definitely ended. I have never lived up to our tacit agreement, but he knew that, and was apparently satisfied; he has always treated me fairly, whatever his faults may be, and unless he puts me on the defensive I shall do nothing to harm him."

"Not even if you are convinced that he has committed a serious crime?" asked Tommy; and D'Armenthal laughed ironically.

"My dear sir, I don't suppose that he would hesitate at anything," he said. "I have no illusions about him. I know that in many ways he is the most dangerous man to run across in America. But it's not my business to expose him, and I shall be busy enough working out my own salvation. I have told you gentlemen my story because I like you and want your friendship; but not under false pretenses. There my duty toward you ends; I have no concern with the crimes of others."

"But, for instance, suppose that 'the cub' had fallen into his clutches and you were able to do his sister a great service by giving up what you know, even if it did hurt 'the old man'?" said Tommy.

D'Armenthal hesitated for a moment, and then shrugged his shoulders. "Mr. Williams, if you knew what I had suffered, you would appreciate that I want to let the past bury itself," he pleaded. "I don't care how decently I may live in the future, the past can never be wiped out, and I shall never place any woman in a position where it can be thrown up at her. I am done with all that, and I hope that I shall never be mixed up with my old associates; but I won't peach, so let's drop that part of it. I have told you my story, and you have only to say the word to have me

get out, and, while I should bitterly regret it, there would be no resentment. I'll answer any questions you like to ask me about my own delinquencies, but about those of others—no!"

"I think that you are making a grave mistake in trying to shield a band of crooks; but don't give me a definite refusal yet," answered Tommy quietly, and something in his manner warned me that he was going to try other means than persuasion with his guest to obtain information. "It's always wise to sleep over a difficult proposition, D'Armenthal, so don't give me a definite refusal now." He had risen and stood looking down on D'Armenthal, who was half-reclining on the couch. "Try a nap here, for you must be played out, poor chap," he said soothingly. "Sleep and refresh yourself, sleep and let wiser counsel come to you in dreams, sleep and forget the misery of your past, sleep and dream of a brighter future. Sleep, D'Armenthal, sleep, sleep, sleep!"

There was something wonderfully quieting in his voice, and as he came to the repetition of the word "sleep," his slender white hands were making rapid passes, and D'Armenthal's long lashes drooped heavily until they rested on his cheeks. Tommy continued to work over him for several minutes, gently stroking his forehead and closed eyelids with his finger-tips, until he was satisfied that his subject was thoroughly under his control.

"Oh, Tommy, is this necessary?" I exclaimed, as he turned to me triumphantly. "The poor devil has humiliated himself sufficiently by his voluntary confession, and I am absolutely convinced of his sincerity in wishing to brace up. It seems cruel to extort things from him which may force you to put him in the witness-box and publish his past weakness to the world."

"Stow all sentiment about this delegate," said Tommy sternly. "Perhaps he does want to reform, but he has led a dog's life for years, and I'm too old a hand to be influenced by this claptrap about honor among thieves. I'm after a criminal, and if this bird can

sing and won't sing, he must be made to sing, or have his neck wrung. That five thousand isn't Stuke's money, and it has given me another indication that Wakefield is guilty, and I'll prove it; but I've got to have all that this man knows. I shall not harm him if it can be possibly avoided, but give up the information, he must. Sit up, D'Armenthal!"

His subject slowly rose from the couch and sat on the edge of it, and Tommy stood in front of him, his finger-tips on the closed lids.

"Now, tell me what you know about Billy Stuke's disappearance," he commanded firmly.

D'Armenthal answered in a perfectly natural voice, and I gave a sigh of relief at his reply: "His sister Rachael took him away—took him back to their home in Stukeville."

"Yes, that was last year; but I'm asking you about two months ago," said Tommy. "Where did he go then?"

"I don't know—I haven't seen him nor heard of him since I left the Hot Springs," he answered, greatly to my relief and Tommy's evident disappointment.

"Come, now, D'Armenthal; he's dropped out of sight for two months, and the last place he was heard of was in Wakefield's gambling-house. What other steerers or stool-pigeons does Wakefield employ?"

"I don't know," answered the hypnotized man positively. "He has a lot of thugs about him who would do anything for him; not for love, but because they fear him. He holds the life or liberty of every one of them in his hands."

"Tell me about them. Who is his chief man—the one to whom he would entrust a particularly difficult and dangerous piece of work?" asked Tommy eagerly.

"Why, Jack Wilson, of course," answered D'Armenthal calmly. "Wilson wouldn't hesitate at murder if Wakefield ordered it, and, although he has a liking for me, it is he that will prob-

ably do for me if 'the old man' takes my desertion seriously."

"Perhaps there is good reason for your friend's loyalty and reticence," said Tommy, grinning at me.

"D'Armenthal isn't a physical coward, however weak he may be morally," I interrupted, in a low voice; but Tommy turned to him again without replying.

"Now, D'Armenthal, I want you to have this man Wilson come to this studio," he said slowly. "I don't care how you manage it, but you must send or bring him here and kidnap him or sandbag him if you can't do it any other way. Remember, this is a positive command. Bring him here tomorrow night. In five minutes you will wake up and not remember anything about this interview except that command. When you come here tomorrow night you will go into this same kind of a sleep again at a word from me. Don't make any mistake about this, or you will get into serious trouble, and now, sleep for five minutes!" Tommy pressed him back on the couch and lighted a cigarette.

"A pest on my scruples!" he said irritably. "There are a thousand questions I should like to ask this man, but I can't because—well, it would be unfair."

I smoked quietly, and made no comment, but I knew that Tommy had fought and conquered a devilish temptation which had risen in his breast from the rustle of a woman's petticoat.

D'Armenthal slept for a few minutes, and then awoke, yawning and stretching himself.

"By Jove! I've been asleep," he exclaimed, as he sat up. "Seems to me that you suggested it, though, Williams; so I won't apologize. Oh, now I remember; you told me to sleep over my refusal to turn informer."

"That's an ugly way to put it, but I suppose it hits the mark," answered Tommy. "Now that you have slept over it, what do you think of it?"

"Just as I did before," answered D'Armenthal positively. "I don't relish the job; but I tell you what I will

do. If you don't mind mixing up with a man who probably has a long criminal record, I'll bring some one to you who can give you all the information you want, if you can get it out of him. It's the fellow who brought me 'the old man's' message last night, and I suppose he's like the rest of us—he has his price, and you can afford to pay."

"Possibly not his price, but I can afford to pay in one way or another, and I should like to meet him," answered Tommy quietly; but D'Armenthal glanced around the room and smiled.

"These are not the surroundings of a poor man, Mr. Williams, but aside from my own observation I received the rating of both of you gentleman from the most reliable agency in the country, and I know that you are rich."

Tommy looked at him with a puzzled expression as he put on his overcoat.

"Oh, it was an unsolicited report," said D'Armenthal, smiling as he held out his hand. "About six months ago 'the old man' suggested that I make your acquaintance."

"Well!" exclaimed Tommy, when the door closed after him. "That's two jolts I've had to-day. First, that ass Longley accuses me of being conceited, and now as shrewd a judge of character as Wakefield takes me for a fool!"

"Perhaps he'll change his opinion before you have finished with him," I said comfortingly, to atone for my indiscretion of the morning; but Tommy looked disconsolate.

"This is a hard nut to crack, but we have made pretty good progress so far," he said. "First, we are convinced that Wakefield has the money, and, consequently must have had the boy in his clutches. Second, he is afraid to attract attention by circulating it locally, or he would have used it to pay D'Armenthal. He took the chance with Sheehan, counting that the three thousand would get him out of the country and it would take a long time for the forty-seven which he would use for his bank-roll to get back from the Argentine. Third, he is uneasy, as evidenced

by the fact that he made large payment to D'Armenthal to keep him quiet and contented, for under the present conditions, thanks to Longley's crusade, no one could bring many suckers to his net. Fourth, he took me for a fool, and that riles me, so that I'll land him if I have to hypnotize all New York. I'll have a try at Wilson to-morrow night, but I must be fresh for Miss Stuke's portrait in the morning, so off with you until luncheon to-morrow."

V.

I found that considerable progress had been made with the portrait when I dropped in at the studio the next day for luncheon, but the young lady had already taken her departure. Tommy smiled when I remarked that I was sorry to have missed her.

"Yes, I knew that you would be, old chap; but cheer up, you shall have the pleasure of spending the evening with her," he said.

"Surely, Tommy, you are not going to have her here when you expect a blackguard like Wilson to show up!" I exclaimed.

He grinned at me a little maliciously. "Say, rather, when to a certainty I shall show Wilson up as a blackguard. No, I don't wish to run the slightest chance of her coming here, so I have accepted an invitation for you to dine with Mrs. Stuke and Miss Rachael, and, afterward, to take them to the theater."

"The devil you have!" I said, in consternation; but Tommy grinned more maliciously than ever.

"You don't seem overjoyed at the prospect of spending the evening with the fair young lady," he said. "You can drop in here afterward, and we will compare our respective evening's amusements."

"Under the circumstances, I should much prefer to spend the evening here," I replied irritably. "I am most anxious to see the battle of wits between you and this man Wilson, and I might be able to help you, too."

"Yes, or to hinder me," said Tommy seriously; and for a moment I won-

dered if he resented my expressed sympathy with D'Armenthal the previous evening. "Now, see here, old chap, you'll have to oblige me in this. Why do you suppose that I advised Miss Stuke to employ the Pinkenhams?"

"Because they have the best reputation in the business, I suppose, but I don't see what that has to do with the disposal of my evening."

"Your guess is partly right," he said, and his face grew more Mephistophelean as he grinned at my irritability. "Wealthy people who get into difficulties usually consult a private detective agency, and, if they are going to do it at all, it is best that they should go to a reliable one. But if there is one particular broth which too many cooks can spoil, it is a criminal investigation. I knew the Pinkenhams would be called in, sooner or later, and I didn't want them messing around here, so I, myself, made the suggestion and started them at the San Francisco end. If the guilty people are here in New York, that will not alarm them, and it gives Miss Rachael something to do to keep her from bothering me."

"But what has all this to do with me?" I asked; and Tommy's smile was so irritating that I felt a desire to punch him.

"The dinner and theater will keep you both out of my way this evening," he answered. "You know that this man Wilson is a very bad egg. He is Wakefield's right-hand man in his battle against Longley; and his wits, which are sharp enough at any time, are trebly on the alert just now. It's going to take all my time to handle him when I get him here, and he would be more than ever on his guard if you were present, for the aroma of the newspaper lingers about you, in spite of your reformation. You will have a very pleasant evening, and I shall give you a full report of the proceedings afterward."

I knew that Tommy would not yield to argument, so I said nothing, although I was terribly disappointed.

"I've had a present this morning," he continued pleasantly. "The amia-

ble Wakefield still keeps in touch with me."

He tossed a note across the table, and I read it while he went to a corner and brought out a large photograph.

MY DEAR MR. WILLIAMS: I am sending with this a photograph which may interest you, not from the subject, but as an example of De La Vergne's work. The portrait was painted in Paris last summer, but it was not at my house when you looked over my collection. I trust that I may soon receive a favorable answer from you about the Newport decorations. Hoping that you will like the photograph well enough to tempt you to drop in and see the original, which is now here,

Believe me, very truly yours,

PHILIP WAKEFIELD.

"Will you walk into my parlor? said the spider to the fly," sang Tommy, as he held up the photograph for my inspection. "This, in the language of our friend Sheehan, 'is a peach.'"

It was, indeed, a remarkable likeness. The great portrait-painter had caught the gambler's features and expression to the life. It was a kindly, benevolent face which looked from the photograph, until one examined closely the lower part of it; but I thought how one or two strokes of the brush about the brow and eyes would have transformed the whole expression into one of viciousness and malevolence.

"I suppose that you will go to see the original," I said; but Tommy shook his head and laughed.

"Not for your Uncle Thomas," he replied. "The old wolf scents danger, and I'm not thrusting my head into his den. Sheehan was here this morning in a blue funk. He had received a very peremptory message from 'the old man' wanting to know what he was up to, and demanding an immediate interview."

"Great Scott, Tommy! does Wakefield have a private detective force?" I exclaimed; and he chuckled.

"I had twenty of those thousand-dollar bills changed at as many different banks yesterday, and I guess he's got wind of it," he answered. "I knew that he must have a great many different sources of information, and I

wanted to find out how perfect his system was. I think that I have demonstrated that he gets private tips from, at least, some of the banks, and I suppose that is how he got on the trail of our little nest-eggs."

"But how about Sheehan? Won't Wakefield scare the information out of him?" I asked; and Tommy indicated the secret entrance to Lingard's old studio by a jerk of his head.

"He's in there, hiding himself at my suggestion," said Tommy quietly. "He's only too glad to lie low, for he is in mortal terror of Wakefield. If things go wrong, I'll have to get him quietly out of the country, for from a few admissions he made I don't believe that his fears are altogether without foundation. We are up against a man who never forgets an injury, however lavishly he may pay for favors received; and he has built up a machine that will execute vengeance at a word from him. Sheehan confirmed D'Armenthal's hint as to his employees; they are most of them in his power because he holds evidence that would convict them of everything from petty larceny to murder."

"You are stirring up a wasp's nest, then, and running the risk of getting into serious trouble," I said warningly; but Tommy gave a characteristic confident nod of his head, and smiled.

"I suppose that is the safest kind of a following for an outlaw, so long as he himself is invulnerable," he said thoughtfully. "But if a serious attack were made upon him and it promised success, you would see the whole gang taking to cover or its members tumbling over each other in their efforts to turn State's evidence and gain immunity. They would desert him as rats leave a sinking ship, and you can see that it puts the man absolutely in our power."

"I can't see it," I said doubtfully. "Longley, with the entire police force and all of his official power, has been unable to do anything."

"Because he hasn't gone about his attack in the right way," retorted Tommy emphatically. "He must depend

upon the men who patronize the place to furnish evidence on the gambling charge, and naturally they will not incriminate themselves. This, in a way, affords Wakefield protection. Professional spies are a discredited lot, and he could never get a conviction on their evidence, even if they succeeded in getting past the front door; but Wakefield, shrewd as he is, has put his liberty into our keeping by purchasing that picture. As a last resort, I shall take out a search-warrant for it in the name of Mayhew & Son, to whom I have cabled for authority, and we have a clear case against him which will put him away for ten years. His powerful friends and patrons wouldn't shelter him against a charge of that nature, and his employees would be powerless; but, of course, I don't want to use this weapon if I can land him in the Stuke case."

"If his employees are such a desperate lot, it would be just as well for me to be here this evening," I insinuated.

"I guess I can take care of myself," answered Tommy, laughing. "At any rate, come in later, and if he has disposed of me, you have the threads of the story in hand, and can exact vengeance."

Mrs. Stuke was a pleasant, matronly lady, and her daughter, as I have said, charming; but never did a dinner nor a theatrical performance seem more tedious than those I sat through in their company that night. I resolutely refused their pressing invitation to take supper with them when I took them back to their hotel; and, after thanks and adieux which were almost discourteous in their abruptness, I jumped into an electric hansom and offered the chauffeur strong pecuniary inducements to disregard the speed regulations in getting me to Tommy's studio.

I found Duck Sing in the outer hallway, evidently in great distress, and he dragged me in through the kitchen entrance to the apartment.

"Plenty muchee bobbery in there," he said, pointing to the studio with a

shaking yellow finger. "Stlange man he makee too muchee flouble."

The sound of a voice raised in anger was audible from the studio, and I opened the connecting door and entered quietly. A table and two or three chairs were overturned, the floor was littered with broken glasses and decanters, D'Armenthal lay on a divan, apparently fast asleep, while Tommy sat quietly in a chair, facing the door.

Standing with his back against it, his eyes flashing and his face livid with passion, was Jack Wilson, and he had Tommy covered with a bulldog revolver, while he poured out a torrent of abuse.

"Don't you make a move, you ——— paint-slinging dude, or I'll drill you!" he said angrily, unaware of my presence. "I'll get to the bottom of this business if I have to tear it out of your heart. What do you mean by it?" Just then he caught sight of me, and it seemed to make his passion absolutely ungovernable. "Ah, blast you! I'll do for you, anyway, if I swing for it!" he shouted; and before I could reach him he pulled the trigger, but there was no explosion. It was a self-cocker, and the cylinder spun around rapidly as he pulled the trigger time after time. The hammer snapped harmlessly, and, with a cry of rage he grasped the barrel and sprang forward, evidently intending to smash Tommy's head with the butt; but he pulled up suddenly as he looked into the muzzle of a forty-five and Tommy uttered a sharp command.

"This pistol won't miss fire, and I'll blow your head off if you come a step nearer," said Tommy coolly. "Drop that gun, sit down in that chair, and tell me what the devil you mean by kicking up such a row in my place."

"You tell me what you mean by bringing me here and giving me knock-out drops, first," answered Wilson sullenly; but he took the chair which Tommy indicated, and I picked up the revolver which fell from his hand, and slipped it in my pocket.

"Nonsense!" said Tommy. "You dine with D'Armenthal, drink a lot of wine, come here, and take a couple of

high-balls, and fall asleep—you don't have to go any farther for an explanation."

"That's a lie, and you know it!" exclaimed Wilson savagely. "I don't drink, nor does D'Armenthal, and look at him! He's dead to the world, and there's been enough noise to bring the police in here. Do you mean to say that he isn't doped?"

"I assure you that he is not," said Tommy, grinning. "He sleeps more soundly than you do, Wilson; probably he has a better or an easier conscience."

"He got a bigger dose, you mean," blustered the gambler uneasily. "I don't know what your game is, but you've hoccussed both of us. You've got the drop on me now, but you'll smart for it if I ever get you outside."

"Now, don't be nasty, Wilson," said Tommy coaxingly. "If any one has cause to complain, it is I. You fall asleep here, and when you wake up you overturn my furniture, break my glass-ware, and incidentally try to murder me, after using a great deal of bad language. Be a good boy, now; go home and sleep it off, and I'll say nothing about it."

"I'll get out of your infernal joint quick enough, if you'll unlock the door, and I'll take D'Armenthal with me," growled Wilson.

But Tommy's manner lost all softness as he rose and stood in front of him. "You'll get out now, and alone, or I'll throw you out," he said sternly. "Don't try any bluff with me, Wilson, or I shall wire to the sheriff of Arapahoe County, Colorado, the address of Jack Wilson, alias Short-card Jack, alias John Bolton."

The man in the chair wilted, all pretense of bluster fell away from him, and his knees fairly knocked together as he groped for his hat and coat.

"Give him back his pistol," said Tommy contemptuously. "I advise you to get a more reliable gun, Wilson, in case you should meet that Colorado sheriff. I understand that he is very handy with his, and an expert at tying a hangman's noose."

The man shot a look of hatred at Tommy, who was unlocking the door, but when it was opened he went out hastily without a word, thrusting the revolver in his pocket.

"I expect that he would have had me, except for my precautions," said Tommy, as he took a half-dozen cartridges from his pocket and dropped them on the table. "While he was asleep I just drew the teeth of his bulldog, to keep it from biting."

"And I expect that I have missed an interesting séance," I said ruefully. "You ran a totally unnecessary risk by sending me off."

"Well, you arrived in time for the dénouement," answered Tommy, grinning. "I took the precaution to post Duck Sing on the lookout for you, in case I should be too busy to open this door. I've struck a rich mine of information by this night's work, and we shall have Mr. Wakefield where we want him. He's uneasy now, for he can't locate the source of his new danger, but I expect that I shall hear from him to-morrow, after he has Wilson's report. Now, let's take D'Armenthal in to keep Sheehan company. He's drunk, mind you, if any questions are asked."

We walked over to the sleeping man, and Tommy leaned over him and placed his finger-tips softly on his eyelids.

"You will sleep until to-morrow morning, D'Armenthal, and then awaken naturally. You have taken a little too much wine, and I am putting you to sleep in my apartment. You have heard nothing and seen nothing out of the ordinary here. Get up, now, and follow me."

The sleeping man rose mechanically and placed his hand on Tommy's shoulder, walking to the corner of the room.

"Hypnotism is a labor-saving device," said Tommy, smiling, as he pressed the hidden catch. "We'll carry him the rest of the way to delude Sheehan, so take hold of his heels."

The panel slid back noiselessly, and we carried the unconscious man through the closet between the two studios. Sheehan, who was nervously shuffling a pack of cards, looked up

apprehensively, and his hand slipped toward his hip pocket, but he gave a sigh of relief when he recognized us.

"I've brought you a companion in misery, Sheehan," said Tommy, smiling. "He will not be much use before morning, for he's a dead one just now, so you will have to be content with solitaire until he wakes up."

"The devil take the cards!" growled Sheehan. "All the kings and jacks seem to look like Phil Wakefield, when I turn them over, and they give me the shivers. Say, Mr. Williams, won't you let me quietly beat it? Never mind the money."

"I need you to nurse this chap," said Tommy, laughing at his fears. "Solitude was getting on your nerves, Sheehan, but take it easy. I promise you that within forty-eight hours you will be free and absolutely safe. Keep an eye on D'Armenthal to-night, and don't let him win your money to-morrow."

Sheehan gave a grunt of dissatisfaction and was evidently little comforted, but Tommy gave him no further information, and we returned to the studio.

"It would not be wise to turn D'Armenthal loose just now," he said, after he had closed the panel. "You will be glad to hear that what I have learned to-night makes him out rather less black than he painted himself, and I believe that the chap is sincere in his desire to live straight."

I thought that I detected a little trace of disappointment in Tommy's voice, as if he regretted that he had to make the admission; but I knew that he was absolutely honest and sincere and would wrong no man. He had a secret dread that he might misuse the strange power which his mastery of the mysteries of hypnotism gave him, and while he was absolutely inflexible and relentless in applying it to uncover guilt, he was constantly on his guard lest he should injure the innocent.

"I've had rather a strenuous evening, and I have a hard day before me to-morrow, old chap," he continued a little wearily. "Suppose that you let

me off telling you the full details until I can get the facts sorted out and formulate a plan. We'll have a nightcap and turn in."

He called to Duck Sing to bring us fresh glasses, and threw himself on a divan.

"I didn't have much trouble getting Wilson under," he said slowly. "It was after I was finished with him and he woke up that he raised the row. I told you that he would be on his guard, and although he had no memory of the damaging admissions he had made, he was suspicious when he found that he had been asleep. D'Armenthal, of course, went to sleep at a word—you know how simple it is when I have once had a man in a trance—and I used suggestion with the other and soon had him nodding. It's too long a story to go into to-night, but, by Jove! old chap, we've stumbled on to a big thing! This man Wakefield is the biggest rascal-unhung, and we should deserve well of the community if we could send him to the electric chair. I am not entirely satisfied as to his degree of guilt in this particular case, but it is only an incident in a long career of crime. There will be bad news to go to the ladies you were with this evening, but I imagine there will be a certain consolation for the younger one in the results of our investigations. Oh, thunder! I'm all upset by this business! Go home, there's a good fellow, and come in to luncheon to-morrow, when I'll be more myself."

I had never seen Tommy in just this frame of mind, and, although I was burning with curiosity, I left him without asking questions. But his half-confidences and Sheehan's terror had impressed me so much that I avoided dark streets, and caught myself looking over my shoulder suspiciously as I walked home to spend a sleepless night.

VI.

Tommy was in an easier frame of mind when I came for luncheon the following day, but there was something about his face which told me

that he had been under a considerable mental strain. I looked at the portrait and found that it had not been touched, and he informed me that he and his sitter had spent the morning in talk, and that he had not worked at it.

"I've been paving the way for D'Armenthal to square himself; giving the devil his due and that sort of thing, you know," he said, with assumed carelessness. "I think that it gave her more pleasure than any amount of progress which I could have made with the portrait—about which she is little interested. Try some of this omelet; it's one of Duck Sing's original creations."

"But what about her brother's case?" I asked; and he laughed more naturally.

"Oh, that's all right," he answered. "Nothing which we can do will change what has already happened, but it will, at least, be cleared up. I had another note from Wakefield this morning. He said that one of his employees had told a most extraordinary story of his experiences in my studio which he could hardly credit; asked tenderly about D'Armenthal, and suggested that I call upon him, as he would discharge Wilson from his employ if he had been rude, and asked for an answer."

"What did you reply?" I asked. "Surely you are not going there!"

"No, Mahomet must come to the mountain this time. I told him that I should be at home at eight this evening and very glad to see him, but that my engagements absolutely prohibited my calling upon him. He's devilish uneasy, all right enough, but he can't have any idea of how much I really have up my sleeve or he would be on pins and needles."

"I don't believe that he will come here," I said; but Tommy laughed.

"Oh, yes, he will; he'll be here without fail," he answered positively. "I think that he will come voluntarily, but if he's bashful about it, I have arranged with the police to bring him. There will be quite a session with Mr. Wakefield. Longley and his stenographer, and Clancy with his side partner, will be behind the tent curtains, there, and

you will be armed, and I count upon you to keep any one else from coming through that door after it starts. You can judge from that that things are coming to a climax."

"For Heaven's sake, Tommy, tell me what you have found out!" I said.

"I have found out that we are dealing with a dangerous gang of men, and I am going to get my life insured, as a matter of precaution," he answered. "Doctor Oakland is coming this afternoon to see if I am sound enough to pass the medical examination."

"Confound Oakland and his examinations!" I exclaimed irritably. "I want to know what you have been up to."

"Softly, old chap; that's what Wakefield wants to know, too, and you must not speak disrespectfully of the good doctor. He is at the top of the profession, you know; hand in glove with all the philanthropists, and gets more subscriptions for his new hospital than all the rest of them put together," said Tommy banteringly; but I should have used strong language if Duck Sing had not at that moment admitted the famous physician.

He was a noticeable man; tall, thin, and with a clean-shaven face, save for small side whiskers, which were as white as the tall collar which showed above the black cravat. He was immaculately dressed in dark-colored clothes, and the silk hat in his hand was perfectly ironed and as shiny as his patent-leather shoes. He glanced about him, as if he were surprised to find such a luxuriously furnished apartment in an unfashionable neighborhood, and then looked questioningly at us until Tommy introduced himself and presented me.

"A beautiful studio you have here, Mr. Williams," he said pleasantly. "I don't know that I have ever seen so charming an arrangement."

The large photograph of Wakefield's portrait was conspicuously placed, and the doctor made a sound which resembled the purr of a pleased cat as he put his glasses on his nose and looked at it carefully.

"Ah! a photograph of De La Vergne's portrait of my friend Mr. Abel Storch!" he exclaimed. "An excellent likeness, don't you think, Mr. Williams? But this photograph scarcely does the portrait justice."

"No, they rarely do," answered Tommy carelessly; and I was mystified that he did not correct the doctor's error and at the gleam of satisfaction which his face betrayed. There was a certain likeness to the well-known Californian multi-millionaire, whom I had interviewed when I was a reporter, and I knew that Tommy was playing a game; but he quickly shut me out of it.

"The doctor will want to go over me now, old chap; so I shall have to ask you to excuse me. Do you mind dropping in at Lingard's studio? D'Armenthal is rather seedy to-day, but tell him that the doctor will call upon him about eight this evening. I am expecting you back to dinner, you know; seven's the hour."

I shook my fist at Tommy's Mephistophelean mug behind the doctor's back, but he answered only by a gesture much used by aggravating small boys, and, although I returned long before dinner-time, my curiosity was not satisfied, for he was out, and did not come in until just before the meal was served.

"Congratulate me!" he said gayly, when he entered. "Doctor Oakland—than whom there is no greater authority—has pronounced me a perfect specimen of manhood; apt to live to a ripe old age, barring accidents."

"I have half a mind to prove him a false prophet by wringing your aggravating neck," I answered grimly; but Tommy laughed as he suggested that I soothe my troubled spirits with a cocktail.

VII.

If "punctuality is the politeness of princes," Wakefield justified his title of the "King-pin Gambler," for he rang the bell as the clock was striking eight. Tommy had used all of his wonderful skill in illumination to light the studio in the most impressive way, and the

seat prepared for his guest's occupancy was placed so that his face should be in the strongest light, while Tommy's own was partly in the shadow.

Longley, his stenographer, and the two detectives were between the wall and the curtains of the Arab tent, and Tommy had assigned me a seat near the door, which Duck Sing carefully locked after admitting the gambler. If Wakefield was at all suspicious, there was nothing in his manner or expression which betrayed it, and he greeted us both cordially, and lighted a cigar with a hand as steady as a rock.

"I was extremely annoyed with my man, Wilson, when he told me that he had made some sort of a disturbance here last night, Mr. Williams," he said courteously. "He told me some incredible yarn about being drugged, but I suppose that he was drunk; although I never knew that he had that failing."

"It wasn't altogether a pleasant experience, and he did kick up a considerable row, but I don't see how you can feel in any way responsible, Mr. Wakefield," answered Tommy, smiling. "You certainly had nothing to do with his being here, and his attempt to murder me failed because his pistol would not work."

Wakefield raised his eyebrows in astonishment. "Ah! that is one of the details he omitted to tell me," he exclaimed. "He must have suffered from a temporary attack of insanity, but it shows the danger of the habit of carrying firearms. I am constantly impressing upon my men that they should not do it; and as for myself, I never carry a pistol. Will you give me the details of the story, Mr. Williams?"

It struck me that his remark was made in bravado; that he wished to show Tommy that there was no fear in his mind or that he despised his antagonist; and I knew that Tommy received the same impression.

"Certainly, I'll tell you just what happened," he said quietly. "I am glad that you deprecate the carrying of pistols, Mr. Wakefield; I rarely have one about me, but since last night I have been foolish enough to lug one about,

for I have been a trifle nervous and apprehensive."

As he spoke, he drew a revolver from his pocket and laid it on the table beside him, within easy reach of his hand, and Wakefield watched him with an amused smile on his lips.

"Mr. D'Armenthal brought your man Wilson here," Tommy continued, "and they had two or three drinks each, and both fell asleep. When Wilson awakened he grew very abusive, seemed to imply that I had drugged him to extract information which he wished to conceal, and made himself extremely offensive by his violence. You may be surprised that I should have one of your employees here, but I thought that he might tell me something which I am extremely anxious to know." Tommy paused for a moment, and his fingers played nervously with the butt of the revolver on the table. "It has to do with the disappearance of a lad named William Stuke," he continued abruptly.

Wakefield gave not the slightest sign of discomposure. "Was Wilson able to help you at all?" he asked calmly.

The look of determination which I knew so well came to Tommy's face. "He babbled a little—in his sleep," he said curtly. "Not all that I wanted to know, so I have asked you to come here to give me further enlightenment."

"Really, Mr. Williams, you are wasting your time and mine," answered Wakefield, with a trace of annoyance in his voice. "I am sorry that you have thought it necessary to—shall we say tamper?—with one of my men. I don't admit your right to question me about my business or the people who frequent my house, and it would have been far more courteous if you had applied to me in the first place. What is it that you wish to know?"

"Everything that you know about this young man," said Tommy firmly; and Wakefield laughed.

"Mr. Williams, aside from the reticence about my business which I necessarily owe to my patrons, there are certain things about it which might be called trade secrets," he said frankly.

"To be perfectly open with you, you must know that high stakes are played for at my house, and it often happens that a gentleman has not sufficient ready money about him and wishes for credit. It is my business, and that of my principal employees, to be thoroughly posted as to the financial standing of possible patrons, and, now that you mention the name, I believe that certain inquiries of that nature were made about young Stuke, the 'Tobacco Prince,' I believe he was called. I am not sure but that he has occasionally played at my place, but I know that he has never obtained credit there. However, I'll make inquiries, and let you know the result, if it will be of use to you."

"No, thank you; you need not go to that trouble. If you will just tell me all you know yourself, it will be quite sufficient," said Tommy dryly.

A little flush of anger came to Wakefield's face. "This is passing the bounds of politeness, Mr. Williams," he said irritably. "I have already told you that I recall nothing special about the boy, and if you adopt that tone, I shall simply bid you good evening."

"I advise you to take it easily, Mr. Wakefield," said Tommy quietly. "This is a serious matter, and I shall not conceal from you that there is a strong suspicion about that you know something of it. If you can convince me that you know nothing, I shall most humbly beg your pardon; but the disappearance of a boy with a half-million dollars in cash is not a case which will be dropped to avoid wounding any one's sensibilities."

"Do you accuse me of having anything to do with it?" asked Wakefield hotly, and there was no look of benevolence on his face.

"I accuse no one; I am simply trying to get at the facts," said Tommy, and his long white hand closed about the butt of the revolver. "I'll lay my cards on the table, Mr. Wakefield. I have every reason to believe that the boy lost a very large amount of money, half of which did not belong to him, playing a system at roulette in your gambling-

house. If you can prove to me that he lost it fairly, that the bank had only the legitimate percentage, and that the boy met with no foul play, so far as I am concerned you can keep the money. Now, if you wish to make any explanation, well and good."

"You are very kind, Mr. Williams," answered Wakefield ironically, and he calmly lighted a fresh cigar. "Money lost at my house is always fairly lost, and if your young friend dropped any, which I do not admit, I think that I shall keep it without your permission. And now, if you please, we will drop this very disagreeable subject, or I shall bid you good evening."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Tommy, looking squarely at him. "We shall not drop the subject, and I shall have to ask you to remain until I have refreshed your memory. We don't want any unpleasantness, Mr. Wakefield; but I warn you that if you leave here before I have finished you will be arrested on a very serious charge, of which there is the fullest evidence, and Mr. Longley will take the center of the stage in my place."

I should have liked to have taken a peep behind the curtain at that moment, but there was plenty of interest in watching Wakefield. For just an instant the mask dropped from his face, and his expression was that of an enraged beast, and fully justified Tommy's rather theatrical precaution of the revolver; but he quickly regained his self-control and carefully flicked the ash from his cigar.

"Mr. Williams, I thought that you were a gentleman, not a detective," he answered quietly. "I know that I am an outlaw, and that I am not in a position to resent your insinuations. If you assume the rôle of a police officer, our relations change, and I shall protect myself as best I can. I am ready to resume the subject on that understanding—go ahead."

"It's a relief to get on that footing, Wakefield," answered Tommy grimly. "Just remember that any admission you make will be used against you, but I am not asking you questions. Your

memory seems so poor that it is useless at this stage, but I shall endeavor to refresh it for you."

He clapped his hands, and Duck Sing came noiselessly from his pantry.

"My compliments to Mr. Hoadley, and ask him to come in," said Tommy; and the Chinaman shuffled back with a scarcely audible "All lightee." In a few moments he ushered in an alert, well-dressed, pleasant-faced young fellow who had apparently been waiting in the dining-room.

Wakefield looked at him expectantly, but Tommy did not introduce him to the newcomer.

"Mr. Hoadley, you are one of the tellers at the Chemical National, are you not?" Tommy asked; and the young man answered in the affirmative.

"Do you recollect paying a considerable amount in currency to a young man named William Stuke, about two months ago?"

"Yes, it was an unusual form of payment for such a large sum—five hundred thousand dollars—and I remember it very distinctly," he said, smiling. "I thought at the time that the young man was not accustomed to banking methods, but the check was good and his identification satisfactory, so, of course, I paid him as he requested. I took the precaution, in case there should be any question about it, to note the numbers of the bills. They were all new, five-hundreds and one-thousands, and the numbers ran serially."

"Will you kindly tell me if these numbers were among them?" said Tommy, as he handed him a paper; and Wakefield watched the bank clerk closely as he carefully compared and checked the list with one which he took from his pocket.

"Yes, every one of them," he said, as he handed back the paper. "Can I give you any further information?"

"Thank you, no," answered Tommy, clapping his hands. "Duck Sing, show Mr. Hoadley out, and ask Mr. D'Armenthal to be good enough to come to me."

Wakefield smiled when the Chinaman left the room, and there was not the

slightest trace of uneasiness in his manner as he quietly smoked his cigar. He nodded cordially to the Southerner when he entered through the secret panel from the adjoining studio, and, of the two, D'Armenthal seemed the more ill at ease.

"There is no use in raking up past history, which has nothing to do with the case in hand, but I believe you admit, Mr. D'Armenthal, that for several years past you have been practically in the employ of this man."

"Yes," answered D'Armenthal, flushing. "I am ashamed to say that I cannot deny it."

"I'd never have given you away, D'Armenthal," said Wakefield sarcastically. "I always treated you fairly, but I never trusted you very far, for I knew that you hadn't back-bone enough to stand the gaff."

"No, I hadn't; you were quite correct in your estimate of my character," answered D'Armenthal bitterly. "If I had possessed any back-bone I should never have fallen into your clutches."

Wakefield laughed scornfully, but Tommy held up his hand for silence.

"There is nothing to be gained by slanging each other," he said sternly. "I simply want Mr. D'Armenthal to refresh that poor memory of yours, Wakefield."

The gambler looked at Tommy curiously as he noted the difference in address which Tommy emphasized as he continued:

"Mr. D'Armenthal, I believe that about a year ago you were at the Hot Springs of Arkansas, and while there met a young man named Stuke. Have you a letter which you received from this man Wakefield in reference to him?"

"No, I haven't; I destroyed it, but I can give you the substance of it," answered D'Armenthal; and I thought I could detect an expression of relief on Wakefield's face at the admission, and he watched his ex-employee with an amused smile as he repeated the contents of the letter.

"Just to refresh your memory, you know," said Tommy, grinning at Wake-

field when he had finished. "I am afraid that you had forgotten that you took—shall we say a fatherly?—interest in the orphan at one time. It must have slipped your mind in the multitude of your good works. I understand that you did me the honor to put my name on your list for philanthropic attention, and that rather hurts my pride, you know."

"D'Armenthal, your unsupported word wouldn't be worth a white bean in a court of law, if you went on the witness-stand," said Wakefield contemptuously. "Your treachery to the man who lifted you from the gutter will not do him any harm, and it may——"

"Possibly restore a little of my self-respect and rid the community of a scoundrel who tempts decent men to their destruction," interrupted D'Armenthal fiercely; but Tommy stopped the discussion.

"Just ask Sheehan to come in, will you?" he said; and Wakefield laughed.

"Why, Mr. Williams, you must be running a mission to reform gamblers," he said. "Really, I believe that you will have wings sprouting on me yet."

"I don't attempt the impossible," said Tommy, grinning as Sheehan came in. "I am not interested in reformation, and I fancy this delegate would lay the odds on any sporting proposition yet. Now, Sheehan, I want you to tell us the history of that picture deal. Of course we all know that it was stolen."

Sheehan looked apprehensively at Wakefield and hesitated, but Tommy told him sharply to go on.

"I'm not giving up anything but what he knows already, Phil," he said apologetically.

Wakefield nodded. "Don't mind me, I'm curious about it myself, Mike. Let's have the story," he said encouragingly, and he listened as if he possessed only the interest in it of an ordinary hearer.

"Well, it was pinched from Mayhew & Son, in London, twenty-eight years ago—never mind who turned the trick, he's dead now. He cut it out of the frame and got it safely to America in the false bottom of a packing-trunk, but he might as well have stolen a white

elephant from the Zoo, for all the good it did him. There was such a row raised about it that he didn't dare make a stagger to dispose of it, and Mayhew & Son were not making any 'no questions asked' bluff in their offers of reward. He was a professional crook, but not at all in that line of work, so no one ever suspected him, and he kept the thing hidden. He cashed in about a year ago, and as I had done him a couple of good turns and had about three thousand of his markers, his widow came to me and put me wise about the chromo. I took it, gave her the markers, and said I'd do the square thing if there was anything in it. I wasn't taking any chances and hunting trouble by hawking it around, for picture-dealing's a little out of my line; but I thought it would be a good test to stack Wakefield up against it, and see if he'd raise a holler. Honest Injin, Phil! I didn't think you'd fall for it, and I was mighty surprised when you took it off my hands at the price. I knew that you were wise about where it came from, but I counted that you could keep it cached unless Longley's bulls got into your joint, and they wouldn't be looking at the pictures. I hope you're not sore about it."

"Not a bit," said Wakefield cheerfully. "There's no use pretending that I didn't know about it, for every man that is in the picture market has heard of that theft and seen dozens of reproductions of the painting. Take my advice, though, Mike; stick to your trade and let art-collecting alone—the two don't go together."

Sheehan looked relieved, but his face grew white, and he glanced nervously about, as if seeking an avenue of escape when Tommy asked him for the receipt for the forty-seven thousand dollars.

He produced it with reluctance, and watched Tommy anxiously as he glanced over it.

"Now, Sheehan, this receipt states that the money I received from you was the identical currency which you received from Wakefield in payment for that picture. The numbers of the bills

are noted on it, and I still have twenty-seven of them, which I suppose that you are prepared to identify and swear to, if necessary."

"I'll not swear to a blame thing!" exclaimed Sheehan, in a frightened voice. "I'm no squealer, Mr. Williams. What I told you was as one man to another, for you had me dead to rights, but there's no making me peach on a pal in court."

"All right, Sheehan," said Tommy soothingly. "Just sit down and take it easily. I have a certified check here for forty-seven thousand dollars, and it's yours when you change your mind about giving that evidence, which will, perhaps, not be necessary, after all. Mr. D'Armenthal, I am afraid that I have kept the doctor waiting a long time; will you apologize to him and ask him to come in?"

D'Armenthal left the room, and Tommy took the twenty-seven gold certificates from his pocket and showed them to Wakefield.

"You see, this is part of the Stuke money," he said. "It seems to have been in your possession, so I fear you will have to refresh your memory, or that of your employees, to account for it. Ah, doctor! excuse me for detaining you so long. You have met these gentlemen, I know, and I believe that one of them is an old friend of yours."

Doctor Oakland bowed courteously to Sheehan, D'Armenthal, and me, but when he caught sight of Wakefield, he went to him with extended hand and an exclamation of welcome.

"My dear Mr. Storch, this is indeed a pleasant surprise," he said effusively. "I supposed that you were still abroad, and had I known that you were in New York I should have had the honor of calling upon you at once."

"Don't mention it," said Wakefield dryly, as he took the proffered hand, and the others looked on in amazement. "Is this necessary, do you think, Mr. Williams?" he asked, in a low voice.

Tommy nodded. "I am afraid it is; your memory is so extremely poor!" he said grimly. "Doctor, we have been having a little medical discussion, and

want enlightenment from an authority, as we are all laymen. We were talking about cerebral apoplexy, which I believe I am correct in maintaining is a comparatively rare cause of death in young men."

"Y-e-s," answered the doctor slowly. "Very unusual, I should say; quite so."

"And as I understand it, it is a rupture of a blood-vessel in the brain—something in the nature of a mild explosion?"

"Yes, yes—quite so, quite so," answered the doctor uneasily. "Really, Mr. Williams, I am very busy just now, and I make it a point never to discuss medical subjects with laymen."

"Only a moment, if you please, doctor," said Tommy sweetly. "I am really very curious about this. Now, this explosion; it wouldn't be severe enough to blow the top of the head off, would it?"

"Absurd!" exclaimed the physician irritably. "Mr. Williams, I tell you again that these discussions are always unwise, and your questions are utter nonsense."

"Then, from outward appearances, any tyro, let alone an authority in the profession, should be able to make a diagnosis between a case of cerebral apoplexy and a pistol-wound which had that effect, should he not?" continued Tommy, without regarding the protest.

The effect of his question was remarkable. All of the suave, professional manner dropped from the doctor, and he jumped from his chair and confronted Wakefield with a blanched and terrified face.

"You promised the utmost secrecy about this miserable business, Mr. Storch," he said, in a trembling voice; and Wakefield looked at him and smiled reassuringly.

"Just keep a stiff upper lip, doc, and you'll be all right," he said confidently. "I haven't squealed, and you got your twenty-five thousand for the hospital. That's worth taking your own medicine for, but you won't have any trouble."

"Sit down, doctor," said Tommy curtly. "I want the full history of this business before you leave this room."

The physician sank back in his chair helplessly with a piteous look at Wakefield; but Tommy assured him that he did not intend to harm him if he were perfectly frank.

"Here is a copy of a death-certificate signed by you, stating that Edward Berkely, age twenty-one years, a resident of California, died in this city of cerebral apoplexy," he said, holding out a paper. "Now, I want you to tell me in detail the circumstances which led you to issue that certificate, which you knew assigned a false cause of death."

"I hope that I have not become mixed up in anything discreditable," said the doctor, the paper trembling in his fingers. "I acted from the best and kindest of motives, and did not have the slightest suspicion that there was anything wrong."

"You can make explanations afterward; you say that you are a very busy man," said Tommy impatiently. "Let us have the story, if you please; from start to finish."

There was nothing sympathetic in his voice or manner, and the doctor pulled himself together and commenced his story.

"About seven weeks ago—I could give you the exact date by referring to my visiting-list—I received a message from Mr. Storch, asking me to call at once at his house on Madison Avenue. I had heard of him as a very wealthy Californian, and, by a singular coincidence, I had been asked about him that very morning. A gentleman who is interested in one of the charities with which I am connected called me to the telephone and asked if I knew him personally, suggesting that I might ask him for a subscription. I replied that I had never seen him, and this message coming so soon after seemed rather providential, and I went at once to his house. I found him seated in his study, and the original of that photograph, his own portrait, by De La Vergne, was the only picture or piece of furniture in the room which was not covered up. Mr. Storch explained to me that he intended leaving for

California at once, and the house was to be closed during his prolonged absence, which accounted for its rather desolate appearance.

"But I am in serious trouble, doctor, and I have sent for you to help me straighten it out," he said. "My nephew, the only son of my favorite sister, has been in a scrape, and instead of applying to me to help him out—it was only a matter of a few hundreds of thousands—shot himself! Now, the news that he had been in trouble and committed suicide would kill his mother, and I want you to help me out with one part of it."

"I assured him that I would do everything in my power to keep it quiet; would see the proper authorities, and use what influence I possessed. But he said that wasn't what he wanted. He showed me letters which the boy had left; poor, pitiful pleas for forgiveness from his mother and fiancée, and a full confession of his faults.

"Now, doctor, I can suppress these," he said. "My whole object is to spare his mother the pain which knowledge of his guilt and suicide would give her. The one part I can easily hush up by repaying the money which he took, but I need your help to deceive her as to the cause of death. You know that anything connected with the family of a prominent man always excites interest, and if a death-certificate were filed here, stating that poor Ed was a suicide, the news would leak out, and be telegraphed to California before I reached there with the body. There would be no end of publicity to the whole matter, and I want you to help me to avoid that."

"I assured him that it would be difficult; that a death-certificate once filed could not be concealed, as it was a public record, and accessible to any one.

"Then we shall have to file one which will stand inspection," he said positively, and shoved a paper toward me. It was the certificate of which this is a copy, all filled out with the exception of the cause of death and the attending physician's signature.

"Now, doctor, fix that up for me,

and you will place me under a great obligation," he said. "It's just between ourselves; my servants have all gone to California, and I am the only one that knows of the boy's death. I'll attend to everything myself; get the body in a metallic casket, which will never be opened again, and take it to California. You are harming no one; you are saving the boy's memory from disgrace, and sparing his mother untold misery and humiliation. Come and look at the body, and tell me if you think it is what a mother should see."

"It was a pitiful sight enough; the poor boy had apparently used a revolver of large caliber, and the top of his skull was shattered by the bullet, while the face was burned and discolored by the powder."

"Could you identify him by this?" asked Tommy, passing over the photograph he had obtained from the boy's sister; and the doctor looked at it carefully.

"It's difficult, for the face of the dead man was badly disfigured, but I think it is the same," he said doubtfully.

"It is of little consequence, so long as you can positively identify Mr. Storch," remarked Tommy; and Wakefield grinned.

"I'll admit the identity—of myself, Mr. Williams," he said significantly; and Tommy motioned to the doctor to go on with his story.

"I haven't any excuses which would seem valid to offer for doing an absolutely illegal and unjustifiable thing, but my motive was good," the doctor said frankly. "I made out that certificate, Mr. Williams, attributing the boy's death to cerebral hemorrhage, with acute nephritis as a contributing cause. Mr. Storch was profuse in his thanks, and offered me a very liberal fee, which I refused. Under the circumstances, I don't think that I am violating confidence, although he stipulated that the gift should be anonymous, when I say that the following week I received a draft for twenty-five thousand dollars from San Francisco for my favorite hospital. I never saw

Mr. Storch again until to-night, and I supposed that he was in Europe. The Madison Avenue house is still closed; I noticed it in passing to-day. Now, Mr. Williams, that is the true story about that certificate. I can't tell you how much I regret it, nor what incalculable damage it would do to me to have this story made public. I rely on your generosity to make it no harder than necessary."

"Doctor, it is the complaisance of reputable men that makes life easy for great criminals," replied Tommy gravely. "I'll do what I can to make things easy for you, but it doesn't rest entirely with me. I don't think we need detain you any longer."

He clapped his hands, and when Duck Sing came in to show the doctor out, he handed Tommy a slip of paper. Tommy glanced at it, and, after the doctor had gone, turned to Wakefield with an expression of triumph on his face.

"You may as well let Longley and his men come out from behind the curtain," said the gambler coolly.

Tommy smiled. "I won't be outdone in consideration," he answered. "Your men will be invited in from the hallway, if you will tell me the signal which was agreed upon."

"Oh, any sign of disturbance," said Wakefield; and Tommy motioned to me to open the door. I did so, and just as Longley and his companions came from their ineffectual concealment, Jack Wilson and three others of Wakefield's following were brought in, each securely handcuffed and held by a plain-clothes man.

"Mr. Wilson, alias Short-card Jack, alias John Bolton," said Tommy, doing the honors. "Badly wanted in Denver to answer for the murder of a woman. What's your New York name, my man?"

"Harry Hamilton," answered the second prisoner sullenly; and Tommy consulted a memorandum slip.

"Alias Henry Jackson, alias Highway Harry," he read. "'Escaped convict from San Quentin, where he was doing twenty years for holding up

a Wells - Fargo messenger.' Now yours?"

"William Thornton, sir," replied the third, and Tommy read:

"Alias William Mason, alias Double-shuffle Bill. Expert crooked faro-dealer. Wanted in New Orleans for murder.' Now you, last man?"

"You go to 'ell!" answered the last prisoner surlily.

"English, eh?" said Tommy, scanning the list. "Then you must be William Walters, alias Billy the Bilk, ticket-of-leave man, and wanted by Scotland Yard for passing counterfeit Bank of England notes. Wakefield, I wonder whom you would have seduced into signing my death-certificate if I had been as big a fool as you took me for!"

"Clancy, you may as well add Wakefield to that bunch," said Longley. "Arrest him on the charge of murdering William Stuke."

Clancy stepped forward to place the handcuffs on him; but Wakefield looked at the assistant district attorney appealingly.

"One moment, Mr. Longley; I think that I might be spared this," he said. "You've got me with the goods on, but not on that charge, and I can make it easier all around."

Longley motioned to Clancy to leave him alone, and the detective returned the cuffs to his pocket, but stood close to his prisoner's chair.

"You can make any statement you please, Wakefield, but remember that it will be used against you," said Longley; and the gambler smiled. "You can remove those other prisoners, officers. Where did you pick them up?"

"They were just waiting for Wakefield's invitation to call upon me," said Tommy, grinning. "I didn't want to be interrupted, and, as I expected them, I asked the precinct captain to put a few men in my hallway."

The officers took them out, and Tommy looked expectantly at Wakefield.

"I'll make a clean breast of it, if you'll tell me how you got on my trail," said the gambler, looking at him with

a trace of admiration. "Longley wouldn't have got me in a thousand years."

"Great Scott! your trail is plain enough all through the criminal world, but Wilson gave me the proper hint in this case. He mentioned the doctor's name—I told you that he talked a little in his sleep."

"Confound him! I could have hanged him any day these five years!" said Wakefield, scowling.

"Oh, he'll be hanged fast enough," said Tommy reassuringly, "unless he saves his neck by sending you to the chair for the Stuke murder."

"No fear of that; the boy wasn't murdered," said Wakefield confidently; but as he went on there was a very noticeable change in him. All assumption of polish, of courtliness or kindliness left him, and he stood revealed the cold-blooded, remorseless, but eminently resourceful, sharper and scoundrel which Longley had always asserted him to be. "I suppose, now that I'm copped, you'll go through everything I've got and find the money, so there's no use in putting up a bluff," he said indifferently. "I did win a half-million from the kid, but it was in fair play, for he had a fool system which couldn't win, and he dropped it all in one night. I wasn't in the room, and I wish I had never seen a cent of the money. My employees told me that when he was cleaned out—it was about six in the morning that he made his last play—he rose from the table, and, before any one saw what he was up to, drew a pistol and blew his brains out. Those things happen occasionally in gambling-houses and are hushed up; but Longley was making things so warm just then that there was no chance of pulling the usual ropes, so I did the best I could."

"I knew that it was too risky to hide the body, and the Waldorf people wouldn't stand for it being carried into the hotel as a drunk, and the only thing left was to account for the death as a natural one and conceal the identity. You may not know it, but there is a marked resemblance between Storch, the well-known Californian, and myself.

It occurred to me that his name would go further than that of Phil Wakefield, the gambler; so I used it. I had had my eye on that Madison Avenue house for some time—it was to rent furnished—and before noon I had the lease of it. That portrait was boxed up in my hall; it had just arrived; and I hired a van to carry it up there, and, incidentally, another box.

"You can imagine what that contained; and a sickening job it was to get it packed. Then I cast about for a doctor, and I knew I didn't want a cheap guy; it had to be a top-notch to avoid any question; so I settled on Oakland. Every charity in town touches me regularly, even if it is for money won at gambling, so I was on to his curves. I called him up on the phone, using another man's name, and found out that he did not know Storch personally. Well, he fell for the pathetic, as he told you, and I shipped the body to San Francisco, and it's buried there under the name of Edward Berkely. I had sized up my friend the doctor, and I knew that he would be bluffed if he ever ran across the real Storch, but I gave up the twenty-five thousand as a clincher."

"How about those letters—were they young Stuke's?" asked Tommy; and Wakefield smiled cynically.

"No, I wrote those, and pulled the heavy-pathos stop 'way out. I knew they'd fetch Oakland, if everything else failed. Now, gentlemen, that's the true story. I don't care a cent about myself, but I don't want any of my men to suffer for a murder which was never committed. I'm through!"

He raised his handkerchief as if to wipe his lips, but Tommy gave a warning cry and sprang at him. They rolled on the floor together, and as Clancy and the other detective caught them and pulled them apart, a strong odor of peaches permeated the studio.

"Just in time," said Tommy, holding up the handkerchief. "He had a glass capsule containing a swift-acting poison in this handkerchief, but he's too cold-blooded a brute to get off as easily as that."

"Curse you! you take away all that makes life worth living, and then won't let me die," groaned Wakefield, his face livid as Clancy ironed his wrists; but Tommy looked at him contemptuously.

"I didn't want to let you die easily, and your victims remain to suffer alone," he said sternly. "You take advantage of the poverty and weakness of a decent young man, and do your best to ruin his life; you debase the loftiest sympathies to induce an honorable physician to commit a crime; you rob and practically, if not in fact, murder an unsophisticated boy; you employ criminals and keep them in your service to commit every crime in the calendar by holding the lash over them; you defy all the resources which the law can bring against you—these are things which a few days' investigation has brought out against you; and they are probably but a tithe of your crimes. There isn't an atom of mercy in my heart for you, and I hope that Mr. Longley will hang you higher than Haman."

"You forget that we use electricity now," said Longley quietly. "Mr. Williams, you have broken up the worst gang of scoundrels in the city, and I think that you will be satisfied with what happens to this man. You can take him away, Clancy."

"Here is a check which you can give to Sheehan when you have his evidence," said Tommy, handing Longley

an envelope. "Sheehan, take Wakefield's advice—he was honest in that—don't start art-collecting."

The gambler, who had been dazed by the night's revelations, wagged his head hopelessly and stumbled out of the studio, and Longley bade us good night and followed him.

There was none of the elation about Tommy's manner which I had always noticed when he brought his other investigations to a successful termination, and he walked to the buffet and poured himself a drink before he spoke.

"Now, D'Armenthal, for your part," he said quietly; but I knew the hardest moment of the evening was before him. "I believe that you want to be all right in the future. I believe it so thoroughly that I have told some one else so, and she, too, believes it, so you will have your chance. There is sad news to be broken to Mrs. Stuke and her daughter, and you will be kindly received if you carry the message."

There was a quality in Tommy's voice which I had never before heard, and as he held out his hand there was an expression on his face which I had never before seen.

"If you are sure of yourself, Ralph D'Armenthal, carry that message to them. If you are not, you are still man enough to blow out your brains."

"Thank you, Tommy," said the Southerner, looking him squarely in the eyes. "I shall carry the message."



'T WAS A DARK AND STORMY NIGHT

BLACK night, and the great ship churning through the creaming seas. All was silent aboard, save when a faint echo of the laughter of a belated card-party in the saloon floated to the bridge.

Suddenly the officer on watch looked above. Jove! the masthead-light had gone out!

"Lookout, there!" he cried sharply.

"Aye, aye, sir!" said the man on the forecastle.

"Masthead-light's out!"

"Yes, sir; I know it is."

"You know it is, you swivel-eyed swab! Why didn't you report it, then?"

"Didn't think it mattered, sir. My eyesight's all right. I don't want no masthead-light to see by!"

The Fortunes of Geoff

By K. and Hesketh Prichard

Authors of "*Don Q.*," "*Roving Hearts*," *Etc.*

III.—A PRICE ON HIS HEAD

(A Complete Story)



Geoffrey Heron-

Haye was drifting with each day farther toward the confines of despair. He was weakened with long hunger, his horse only less emaciated than

himself. For weeks past he had been living on the pampas with the smallest camping-outfit a man may have; for weeks he had kept up his vitality by the narrowest of margins. The previous winter had been a hard season during which much game died of cold; and the survivors of the herds had not yet recovered condition. The thin and stringy guanaco meat which Geoff hoarded so carefully seemed to give no nourishment to his big frame. Events and man were, he felt, conspired against him. In his pocket he still carried the paper that had drummed him forth from the ragged skirts of Patagonian civilization:

Hoy! hoy! hoy! One thousand dollars reward to any one giving information which shall lead to the capture of the man known as Geoff or Geoffrey, an Englishman. He stands six feet, of formidable appearance, eyes gray, hair dark, a tooth upon the left side next to the eye-tooth is missing. When last seen he was wearing a suit of English cloth, a gray felt hat, and carried an English sporting rifle. He has been concerned in a robbery of horses in company with Delirez.

Any one giving information about or producing the man Geoff, or proof of his death, will receive one thousand dollars at any comisario in the republic.

On the night when he first read these words, all that was fierce and dark in his character leaped into separate existence. He turned his horse's head once more toward the beech-clad inhospitable slope of the distant cordillera, for he realized that against him his fellow men had declared war, that rifles were already loaded and lassos greased to wrench from him his liberty or his life. It would be the morning and evening hope of many a skilful gaucho thus to earn a thousand dollars reward.

Exiled from England as the result of a chivalrous folly, he had meant in Patagonia to earn an honest living by his hands, and in doing so felt—such had been his upbringing—that he was making considerable concessions to fortune. But since he set foot in the country, events and Pirbright, the sheep-farmer, had combined to frustrate this ambition.

A score of men had turned him with scorn and jeering from their doors. Pirbright had broken faith with him, and every human being he met seemed only to live in order to thrust him farther from the lawful ways of life. These things had left their mark upon his character; the remembrance of them rode ever with him, roweled him as though he must be goaded into some desperate road; a road, moreover, which his wild blood and a hard quality of pride told him he was supremely well fitted to tread.

A thousand dollars! Geoff laughed grimly. It was a poor price! And it showed the condition of mind to which he had fallen that he spent his time as he roamed forward in valuing himself according to the different coinages of the world; some eighty English pounds; four hundred dollars in United States currency; twelve hundred Norwegian kroners. The wind which smote so drearily across a landscape in comparison with which the steppes of Russia might seem hospitable added its setting to his thoughts.

The sun sank away, and a boisterous squall of sleet raved out of the southwest. Under its first blast his horse quivered and stopped. After giving it a moment's rest, Geoff pushed on again, the animal stumbling with dropped head beside him.

Then Geoff fell for the first time under the influence of the awful loneliness of the pampas. What lay before him? To journey on and build his fire—he had half a box of matches left—in the lee of a thorn-bush; to dine on hot water and a spoonful of flour boiled in his kettle; he had no other food; then to sleep or try to sleep, and on again next day, and for a few days afterward, until—he never finished the forecast, but pulled in his belt a hole or two tighter. He was hardly conscious that he had reached the edge of the plateau until he and the horse were half-way down the steep barranca.

A light! Yes, a light burning brightly down there in the hollow below! He made one impulsive step forward, then checked himself. Yes, a welcome for all other travelers save for him. To others that light meant warmth and food and human companionship, but not to him. Round that light were gathered men to whom he was worth one thousand dollars, neither more nor less; he dared not ask for shelter. He ought to be thankful for the sleet which chilled him to the bone; it would at least wash away his tracks.

At the foot of the barranca he paused irresolute. What should he do? He could not turn away into the empty night again; even the sight of the light

brought to him a distant comfort, though only to be succeeded by more ravening pangs of loneliness.

His thoughts took on another color. Men had brought him to this pass. If they would not give, was he not justified in taking? He put his hand on his horse's neck; it was shaking with weakness. The gusts seemed to buffet it with a pitiless energy. Poor creature! it had served him well; it was the only living thing which had helped him through these last terrible weeks, or from which he could make sure of any measure of liking. This thought turned the scale.

Then and there Geoff resolved to play the rôle men had forced upon him. Either he and his horse should eat well that night, or he would never need to eat again. If any interfered with him, why, they must take the risk. His blood quickened as he tied up his horse and strode across to where a ruddy light from an open window shone upon the sleet-covered ground outside.

As he approached, he was surprised at the size of the house. It was by far the largest he had seen in Patagonia, where an estancia is often an affair of two rooms, a mud floor, and a sheepskin bed. But the building that now towered above him was roomy; the windows were many and paned with glass. Farther away, too, there loomed outlines of sheds and buildings. He listened, but neither from the outbuildings nor from the main house, beyond the lights burning in the open windows, came any evidence of human presence.

Geoff drew himself up to the sill and peered into the interior. The room was empty; and in another second he had swung himself over and stood inside.

The lamp on the table showed books and pictures about the walls. It was obviously a dining-room, and far different from the rude homes of the settlers he had previously entered—an ever unwelcome visitor. But it was neither the books nor the richness of the appointments that caused Geoff to start back in such surprise. It was the chaos that reigned in the room.

Everything was overthrown and

smashed; the floor was littered with spurned fragments; the cloth had been torn from the table; some of the pictures had been wrenched from their hangings, and the faces of them beaten in against the corners of the side-board; the very embers had been dragged from the stove and lay smoldering upon the carpet. On every side wanton brutal damage met the eye. Moreover, the perpetrators of it could not have left their work above a few minutes.

Geoff's first care was to extinguish the smoldering fire which already bade fair to raven in the woodwork. He almost laughed as he worked. He remembered that he had come to the house for quite another purpose. He had come, to put it coarsely, in order to loot property and raiment. Here scattered about were property and raiment lying ready to his hand. But the sight of that senseless destruction smote him like a blow. This was the work of fellow thieves—so he concluded—and at sight of it hereditary instincts rose and dominated him, and law and order regained a champion.

But when the dangerous bonfire which had been made by unknown hands was at length extinguished, Geoff felt that the cravings of hunger must be allayed. Yet so strong was become his distaste for the deed of theft, which a few minutes before had seemed both right and natural, that before he ate he searched in his pocket and produced a single gold sleeve-link. That, he felt, would pay for a meal and for a loaf of bread and the cooked ham which he had taken from the side-board. Then he sat down and ate as much as he dared after his long term of starvation.

Then, as he sat resting, he was aware of a great change in his outlook. Hunger, which kills hope more effectually than almost any other power, was banished from him, and he began to feel the wonder and mystery of his surroundings. Who lived in this great house? Who had wrecked the room? Why at such an hour did the place lie empty, lighted, and deserted?

He could find no answer to these questions. Almost he expected to awake from dreams beside his acrid fire to the small comfort of boiling water, to be followed by a hopeless skein of days.

At length Geoff roused himself, and, realizing the sure deduction which must follow on his being discovered there, packed a bundle of food together, and made a last inspection of the room.

"Hello! What's that?"

He stood still and listened. Again the noise, but louder, a sort of faint, choking grunt, and certainly it came from somewhere inside the room. He glanced round. There was no recess for man or animal to hide. Then he stooped. One end of the table-cloth had been pulled to the ground, and under the curtain it made, Geoff perceived some bulky object. He knelt down. It was a man, either dead or unconscious, who must have lain within six inches of his boots as he sat and ate.

Geoff pulled away the table and looked down upon him. He lay on his back, a strong-built man of thirty or perhaps more, dressed as a well-to-do farmer. His closed eyelids stood out startlingly white from the uniform weather-stain of his countenance. His skin was cold, but he was not dead.

Geoff lifted the heavy body in his arms; no odor of drink, which he had expected, assailed him, nor was there any blood to be seen. He laid his burden on a couch which stood along the wall, and began to pass a light hand over the crop of black hair. Ah! here was a great contusion toward the back of the head. Geoff opened the man's collar, and, mixing a little whisky and water, tried to pour a spoonful down his throat.

"What are you doing?"

Geoff raised his head at the sound of a woman's voice. She was half-crouching over the couch, like an animal guarding its young—a big woman, strong and comely enough, the youth of her face obscured by a fierce anxiety.

"He is my husband," she said sud-

denly, flashing a dark look at him. Her whole manner and bearing scintillated defiance and resentment. "Who sent you here?"

"I came for food. I found the window open and—and got in." Geoff was conscious of a certain lameness in his answer.

She laughed harshly. "Another thief?"

"I haven't stolen anything—yet."

The spirit of the pampas blazed in her eyes, the murderous suspicion which, in fear of being struck, would strike first.

"You're too late! Is that why you tried to bring Jim back to consciousness? You want the map, also? Can't you see they've rifled the house? They've got the map and they're gone, Pirbright's ruffians!"

Geoff was roused to a keen interest by this time.

"I give you my word, I haven't a notion what you are talking about."

"Who are you, then? A masterless vagrant?"

Her fearless animosity was splendid. Geoff tried to picture in similar surroundings a girl he knew back in the home-land. Between that thought and the woman's contemptuous question, he smiled.

"Yes, a masterless vagrant," he acquiesced.

The smile appeared to exasperate her beyond all that had gone before.

"You lie! You are——"

"Just now I do not use my surname. I am known as Geoff—perhaps you have already heard of me," he interrupted. "Geoff, the outlaw."

She stared at him. "It's nothing to boast of, but I expect it's fact."

"Now that you know who I am, may I inquire——" he bowed.

"Who we are? Yes, you may. I'm Mrs. Wintrom, and this is my husband, the manager of the Barranca Sheep-farming Company. Now are you the wiser?"

"Yes, a good deal. I've heard of you, and you've heard of me, and, although we stand on very distant rungs of the ladder, we share one sentiment

pretty strongly, and that is to come to a definite settlement with our friend Pirbright."

His words had an odd effect upon her. She threw back her head with a violent gesture, like a person confronted with a momentous and startling decision. She stood quite still, thinking profoundly. Then she fixed her eyes on Geoff with a strong question in them. Everything about her was strong, effectual, vital.

"You said you are a masterless man—will you take service with us?" she said at last.

"Well, you see I'm outlawed."

"Yes, that is awkward, especially as—— Never mind, Jim can have that put right for you when he gets well. In the meantime, I offer you work—dangerous work, that will take a steady head to carry it through."

"I'm willing."

"All right. Then you're our man. Go and search the house. See if there is any one in it beside ourselves, and bar and shutter that window you found so handy awhile ago. Afterward come back here," she ordered.

Geoff took his new position promptly and turned out of the room without a word. When he came back, Jim Wintrom appeared to be sleeping, rather than unconscious.

"Yes," she answered his look, "I think he's doing well. Oh, Jim, Jim! it's for your sake." She bent close over her husband, but the reaction was gone in a second. She straightened herself. "Let us sit as far off as possible, that our voices may not disturb him."

She sat down opposite to Geoff and laid a small sketch map open on her lap. It was painted at one part in small squares of different colors.

"The original of this map is the cause of all his trouble"—she indicated the unconscious third in their conference. "Some months ago Jim was prospecting in the mountains beyond there. You know no one ever visits them. The Indians are afraid, and except for an occasional prospector, no one finds any business in those parts. A horse strayed from his tropilla one day, and

in following it Jim found something which interested him very much, something the existence of which no others at that time suspected."

Geoff nodded.

"Are you aware," she went on, in the same rapid, even tone, "that it is possible to buy almost any area of land—camp, we call it, in Patagonia—at about one thousand dollars a square league? It became necessary for Jim to take up a concession, you understand?"

"Yes."

"He couldn't leave the estancia. It was just shearing-time. I offered to run the place while he was away, for it is practically impossible to buy land unless you go in person to Buenos Ayres. If you apply for it by letter, that at once awakens suspicion, and the guessing as to why you want that particular area always ends in the land being granted to some successful native general or politician or official, who has a pull and gets it for nothing. The next you hear of it comes in an official letter regretting that the land you desire is already sold and offering you a dozen leagues elsewhere."

"Yes, I know," said Geoff. "Argentina for the Argentines is a naturally popular doctrine."

"Jim wouldn't hear of my staying here alone," she went on.

"I don't blame him. It's a hundred miles from anywhere, and there are queer characters upon the pampas," said Geoff, with a smile; "even thieves."

The dark woman met his eyes squarely.

"That's true," she said. "But there are thieves and thieves. And I haven't met one yet that made me shiver—*much*."

"Thanks," said Geoff. "But go on."

"So, instead, he decided to consult a man named Pirbright, who manages and owns shares in a company called the Califate-bush. It is a company with a bad name. They have a saying that when Califate-bush sheep have grazed over a region even the pampas dogs leave it, and certainly it is a fact that there is no gleaning to be done on

their back trail; yet Pirbright has the reputation of being a religious and rigid man."

"Quite so," said Geoff. "I know the man and the company."

"He"—again Mrs. Wintrom waved her shapely dark hand toward the man on the bed—"told this Pirbright just as much as he could not help, offering him a share if he could secure the concession. Then followed wranglings."

"Ou, aye, there would," said Geoff, in a broad accent.

His companion broke into a short, fierce laugh extraordinarily out of keeping with the scene and its rather grisly background.

"And questions, many searching questions. Pirbright declared that he would do nothing blindfold—he insisted on precise knowledge of the locality, for instance."

"How like Pirbright!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wintrom, her dark face pale with resentment. "Pirbright had a great part of the secret, and he meant to tolerate no claims for half-shares. They parted in anger. But though Pirbright knew much he did not know quite all. He broke off negotiations. That was just about a month ago."

"Ah! and then?"

"Nothing happened, at least nothing visible at once. But one by one about that time our best peones began to desert us and their places were filled by others. On these up-country estancias labor is hard to get even at sixty dollars a month. Shearing was coming on, and we had to take whatever came along. The result was that we got about the blackest gang in the country collected in our cook-house. But he"—again the brown hand made its customary sweeping gesture like a homage paid to poor unconscious "Jim"—"he has the knack of holding such men, and he would have held them had it not been for an influence from outside. This afternoon they struck for higher wages and threatened to wreck the estancia if they were refused. He made concessions, but at each concession the demands rose until he saw that they

meant mischief in any case. Finally every man left the place."

"But Pirbright, where does he come in?"

"Ah! that soon showed plainly enough. The peones had not been gone an hour when three men rode up. They pretended they had heard by chance of Jim's find, and they demanded the map. In the heat of the talk—for, of course, Jim refused—they mentioned Pirbright by name, although Jim knew without that who it was sent them to rob him. You saw the end of it. They wrecked the house and"—she looked sadly toward the bed—"they carried off the plan from the desk in this room. But that's past; there's no good in going over it. Listen! A steamer is due to leave Santa Cruz on Friday. On that steamer you may be sure Pirbright will go to Buenos Ayres to take up the concession, for by that time the plan will be in his hands. Santa Cruz is seventy leagues away, and Pirbright wins!" She wrenched her hands together at the thought.

"No," said Geoff slowly, "no, Mrs. Wintrom, he doesn't win until he walks out of the office of the minister of agriculture at Buenos Ayres with the concession signed in his pocket."

She raised her heavy gaze upon him.

"Do you mean that you will go and get the concession for Jim?"

Geoff nodded. He was frowning over some idea in his own mind.

"I have no reason to trust you," Mrs. Wintrom went on, "but I'm going to do it—first, because there is just a chance you may be honest; and more, because if you win through to Buenos Ayres and get the concession even in your own name, you will defeat Pirbright! Here's a reduced copy of the map with the spot marked. See? I give it into your charge in the name of James Wintrom."

"Have you agents at Buenos Ayres?"

"Excellent agents. I wrote their name on the back of the map. They'll put the matter through. Here is the money for your expenses. It isn't much, but it's all I have in the house."

Geoff glanced at the roll of notes. "I think it should do. Now, tell me exactly how much time is left me before the steamer starts."

"About two days. It is now the small hours of Wednesday; the steamer will leave Santa Cruz at daylight on Friday. Have you good horses?"

"Only one, and he, poor creature! has not five leagues left in him."

She stood up, baffled, tempestuous.

"And there's not one of ours left on the place. They saw to that."

"Then I must try and find one of your tropillas. They cannot have driven them very far. Good-by, Mrs. Wintrom, and thank you for your confidence in me."

"Don't thank me," she answered coldly, "I take the odds on your honesty, that's all. Good-by." She turned from him, and moved to her husband's side.

For once, fortune, so long hostile, thrust upon Geoff a favor, and that a great one. He had scarcely ridden three miles upon his way toward Santa Cruz, when, rounding the shoulder of a cañadon, he chanced upon a single horse, and was able to catch the great yellow six-year-old, to which he transferred his saddle. His own poor brute he turned loose to a well-earned rest.

During the months he had spent upon the pampas Geoff had assimilated much camp-lore, and was able to steer a clear enough course by the stars. He knew that the Santa Cruz River flowed some twenty miles to the southward. Due south then he rode at the ambling canter which hour by hour leaves the miles imperceptibly behind.

A rapid calculation told him that he had some thirty hours in which to cover more than seventy leagues. With one horse, a feat quite impossible. But Geoff had a plan by which he thought to find a mode of transit more rapid than the saddle. He knew that on the upper reaches of the Santa Cruz River there lay a boat used as a ferry by the occasional ostrich-hunter or horse-pasturer who invades those solitudes. It was always drawn up upon one bank or

the other of the rapid river. The river itself sweeps with an eight-knot current right from the Andean lakes to the sea, where upon its lower waters and on the lip of the Atlantic stands the settlement of Santa Cruz.

Here lay the road to success, and, as Geoff journeyed forward, the idea of success was sweet in his mouth. Since he had left England, elemental forces had worked upon the metal of his character and had hammered it out against the anvil of sheer bed-rock facts of life.

But he could not, nor did he wish to, conceal from himself the poverty of his chances of success. First there was the race against time, then the probabilities of capture and detention in Santa Cruz, lastly the difficulty of leaving the port without his presence on board being made known to the authorities. Then Pirbright would also be a passenger, and Pirbright knew him, and one word from the sheep-farmer would be sufficient to cast him into the grip of the Argentine law. But all these thoughts as he rode on and on were submerged by others—thoughts of the Geoff of former days, of his old home, and of a girl who had written to him twice since he had been in Patagonia, half-chaffing, wholly sincere letters, which had pleased him mightily.

These thoughts shortened the way. Dawn came up and shone upon the peaks to the westward till they looked like a forest of abnormal tiger-lilies whose gigantic yellow petals lit the waking world. On all sides of him reigned dew and silence, broken only—the sound dying in its very evoking—by the beat of his horse's hoofs upon the laid dust and the tussocks of his pampas road.

The swimming of the river was the first event in the long chain of dangerous labor which the day held for him. The water was ice-cold; indeed, in the force and swirl of the current, blocks of ice were hurried by in scores and companies. But Geoff's mind was set on his mission; already the adventures of the night seemed like a dream.

He drove the yellow horse before him with cries, and together they gamboled

down into the flood. Geoff fixed his fingers in the mane, and, striking out with his feet, more to keep out the cold than to accelerate their speed, the two surrendered themselves to the grip of the current.

Arrived on the far side, Geoff paused only to off-saddle; he then pushed the leaky boat from the shore, and, with the long, wondering face of the yellow horse as his sole audience, steered out into the rip of the current. To follow him upon his voyage would serve no purpose. Merely inanimate obstacles are rarely interesting, so we will leave Geoff warring with rocks and eddies. Soon the yellow horse which at first had accompanied him with wind-swayed tail and coltish gait, tired of the spectacle, and Geoff urged his onward way with no other spectator than the old guanaco bucks which neighed their war-call at him from the sky-line of the cliffs.

It was late when Geoff came across the last ridge and saw below him the town of Santa Cruz. He had made wonderful time, but at the end of his down-river journey he had been forced to abandon his boat, owing to the strong incoming tide which flooded the estuary, and to pursue the final miles of his journey on foot.

The town lay below him. The storm had not yet blown itself out, though its hysterical fury had abated, and the wind now swept in long, mournful, and falling cadences. With the drop in the wind came rain.

Geoff's first impulse was to cast his eyes over the estuary to where the deep-sea steamers anchor, and through the rain he caught the wink of lights. Now, this part of Geoff's journey must be realized to be understood.

Every feeling of a hunted animal was his. Should one single individual in the settlement recognize him he knew well enough how the news would spread and how morning would find the entire able-bodied population after him in full cry.

It is a strange sensation and one fortunately not granted to many to experience the condition of outlawry. Geoff

on that evening, when he saw beneath him the lights of the settlement, had kinship with black and silver foxes—creatures that carry on their backs, in shape of fur, a good and sufficient reason for the enmity of man.

As he walked, Geoff was acutely conscious of the light in which he must appear to his fellow creatures. To the needy he represented wealth in a concrete form. He had been convicted unheard and quite wrongly of the Patagonian equivalent of robbery under arms. Every man's hand was against him, and every man's desire nerved to the effort by a promise of reward.

At no time a very equable man, on that night, as he stalked through the shadows cast by the mounds and hillocks of the waste-land above the town, Geoff burned with anger against his potential enemies. He went down with eyes open to the chances of capture and to the certainty of strange adventures. The wind blew a wild announcement of his entry.

Few people were stirring in the town; but a frontier settlement never sleeps, and as Geoff stole through the streets, wrapped in his ragged poncho, his progress was made up of a series of elaborate avoidances. Several times his heart was in his mouth, but at length he came out safely upon the shingly water-front.

It was his intention to "borrow" a boat and row himself off to the steamer and climb aboard unseen, if possible. But on the water-front he was met by a new and unexpected difficulty. The lights of three separate ships of goodly size burned out upon the waters, and which of these three was the transport for Buenos Ayres and the north he had not the remotest of ideas.

He cast round his eyes to see if there were any one of whom he might inquire, trusting to the darkness to hide his dangerous identity. But the beaches were bare of any human presence.

Geoff turned and looked toward the town. At that moment a man emerged into view and began walking rapidly across the water-front. Geoff hastened

after the retreating figure. Once he had decided to risk asking, he was the last of men to hesitate to do what he had determined to do, quickly.

"Excuse me," he began.

The man turned round.

"What'll you be wanting, my man-nie?" said a voice Geoff remembered.

It came on him like the flash of a lamp that the one man of all others he had wished to avoid was the one he was now in speech with. He was face to face with Pirbright: only the friendly screen of the darkness between them.

Geoff's hands tightened. Even at the moment a spasm of joy got hold on him. This at least was evidence that the steamer for the north had not yet sailed.

"Can you inform me," he said, in even tones, which he made as much unlike his own voice as possible, "whether the steamer for Buenos Ayres has come in?"

"She has."

"And which is she?"

"She'll be one of those," said Pirbright, nodding in the dark toward the lights upon the water.

"When does she sail?"

"The morn."

"Thank you."

Geoff turned to go. He did not dare to question further. But Pirbright called him back.

"It comes to me," said he, "that your voice is not new to me. What'll your name be?"

Pirbright did not guess who his interlocutor was, of so much Geoff was certain, but there dwelled in the man a quality of probing and suspicious curiosity that prompted the question.

"I believe you are right, Pirbright, we *have* met before."

Geoff had made up his mind, and even as the words escaped him his plan stood out clear.

"I know ye! Ye are G——"

"No names, please."

"There's a thousand dollars on your leeberty. I've but to gi'e a cry, and the whole town'd be hot-foot upon your tracks."

On the words, Geoff's right hand

gripped the Scotchman's shoulder and his left held the rising shout in his throat. Pirbright snapped his teeth at him aimlessly. In another moment, Geoff cast Pirbright into the boat beside which they were standing and ran it down into the chilly sea.

The Scotchman's cry for aid was lost in the symphonies of the night. He stared at Geoff with white, scared lips and horrified eyes as the outlaw sculled the boat with the long sea-oars from the shingle.

Geoff knew something of the geography of Santa Cruz and its environs, and he steered his boat by the lights of remembrance. Across the broad estuary lay a long, low line of desolate shore. Toward this he pointed the nose of his craft. It was a place deserted. Once there had been wild shrubs of califate wood which had attracted the visits of those whose business it was to supply the town with wood. Long since, however, the supply had failed, and for years the low promontory had been left to its foreshore population of red-shanks and oyster-catchers. It seemed to Geoff an ideal place for his business.

During the journey across the estuary Pirbright never spoke a word. As a matter of fact, it was patent to Geoff that the Scotchman was every moment expecting that his Charon designed to cast him to the waters. And certainly from Pirbright's point of view the position was an evil one. His eyes were fixed in a stare of terror upon his companion who labored at the oars.

Geoff, half-seen, made a wild enough figure, the wind blowing the spray through hair long uncut, a gigantic poncho-clad presence which to the mind of the Scotchman represented in some sort the Spirit of Vengeance battling uncannily with the storm and the sea.

But as the boat passed away from the shore, and the few wet lights of the settlement vanished in the wilderness of wind and rain, the fear of immediate and chilly death passed, or began to pass, from Pirbright. He would not have admitted it for a moment, but his respect for his captor fell away

when he found that it was no plan of Geoff's to cast him to the waves.

Geoff beached his craft where a small lagoon joined yeastily with the sea, and ordered his passenger ashore.

"I see how relieved you are that I didn't put you overboard. It's in your voice. If I had, I should but have been paying a just debt. I know exactly how much mercy I would have received from you had you been allowed the use of your voice, with its abominable accent, there upon the Santa Cruz beaches."

"Ye've committed an outrage for which ye shall pay dear."

"That is not a very wise speech, Pirbright."

"How no'? It's fact, ye grinner in the market-place!"

"If you don't use more civility I'll take you half-way back in the boat with me and drop you over," said Geoff, who, needless to say, had not the remotest intention of doing anything of the kind. But it pleased him freakishly to act up to the character with which Pirbright had crowned him.

"May the Lorrd soften your heart, ye desperate man!"

"Don't you forget, Pirbright, that if I am a desperate man it was you who made me so. I should be a decent member of society instead of, as you very truly say, a fit object to pray for. Face the situation. I am a man with a thousand dollars reward on my life. That reward you had put upon me, quite undeservedly, as you very well know. I've been hunted by human beings for weeks, and now I'm face to face with the author of all these misfortunes at two o'clock in the morning in a spot singularly suitable for——"

"For what?" screamed Pirbright.

"Murder is an ugly word," said Geoff, "but if I really am the man you've always pretended to believe me to be, it's the only word that fits. Be logical, Pirbright."

There was a sort of easy, half-humorous superiority in Geoff's tones that was new to Pirbright. The man had no imagination. He was possessed by an ecstasy of fear.

He said no word, but gave a little, strangled cry, and, turning, made off at a surprising pace into the darkness. But it was a case of the greyhound and the hare. Geoff caught him by the shoulder and twisted him round.

Pirbright breathed once or twice shrilly. A distaste of the man stung Geoff like a scorpion.

"That's the end of our comedy," he said harshly. "You must know very well I would not soil my hands with you. I'm glad I frightened you, though. I'm glad you know what it is to scamper for your skin."

"You black de'il!"

"Quite," said Geoff. "Well, the dawn will be with us in two hours. It's time I bade you good-by. But before I go there are just one or two little formalities. Hand over your matches."

"Pure robbery, wi' violence."

"Not at all; merely policy. If I were to leave you your matches you would light half a dozen signal smokes and would be taken off at daylight."

"But it is imperative that I embark and proceed to Buenos Ayres in the steamer that sails the mornn."

"Why?"

"I have important business."

"The important business will, I fear, have to wait for the next steamer."

"I'll buy my liberty of you," said Pirbright at last. "I'll give ye fifty dollars."

"Is the important business in Buenos Ayres worth no more than that?"

"Seventy."

Geoff laughed, and began to make preparations for his return voyage. As he baled the water from his boat he talked.

"Don't haggle like a fish-wife—*splash, splash!*—I would not accept thirty thousand—*splash!*—I fancy—*splash!*—that if your business in Buenos Ayres miscarries, you may have to pay a very adequate—*splash!*—price for the enmity you have seen fit to show me. By the way, there was a

man—*splash, splash!*—up-country, who asked me to mail a letter for him in Buenos Ayres."

Geoff threw the baler into the boat, and, standing up, faced Pirbright.

"Somehow, that man was very keen about this letter, and it sticks in my mind that he mentioned your name in connection with it, Pirbright. Something about a concession, I think. What do you say? You want to know the man's name?" Geoff jumped into the boat and pushed off. "Winter—no, Wintrom—James Wintrom. That was the name."

On the words, Pirbright rushed into the water up to his waist.

"This'll cost me thirty thousand dollars," he screamed.

Geoff made no reply as he took his course for the struggling lights of Santa Cruz.

The next morning the transport for Buenos Ayres set sail. Geoff, by the simple expedient of binding up a supposed wound in his forehead in such a manner as to cover the greater part of his face, had secured a passage aboard her without raising suspicion.

As the steamer turned to make the open sea, Geoff, straining his eyes to the long, low shores, imagined he could distinguish a single human figure making frantic signals of distress. One of the officers on the bridge was attracted by the same phenomenon. He used his binoculars and turned to his fellow.

"There is a man making signals of distress," he said.

The other picked up the glasses and looked long and carefully while Geoff's heart beat faster than its wont.

"No, I think he is pleased about something. If it were distress he'd send up a smoke signal. All these Patagonians do. In any case, it'll only take a couple of days to walk round to the settlement."

Geoff laughed as he lit his pipe with one of Pirbright's matches.

The Bread-cutter at Tranquillity Poorhouse

By Howard R. Garis

The alarming crisis that developed in an almshouse through the too strenuous endeavors of the superintendent to be up-to-date; and how an old seaman engineered the most unique mutiny on record



NOT since the day when Amos Bainbridge, the superintendent, newly appointed by the Selectmen, had taken charge was there so much excitement in Tranquillity Poorhouse. The men stood about in the yard, almost forgetting to smoke their pipes, and the women let their knitting-needles lie idle in their yarn-entangled hands as they talked over the matter.

"It's goin' agin' our vested rights an' privileges," broke out Truem Mellick. "I've lived here now goin' on thirteen year, an' I never hearn anythin' like it. 'Tain't right an' jestice, an' I'm goin' t' appeal t' th' Selectmen; that's what I be."

"An' we'll stand by ye," declared Hiram Bascomb.

"That's what we will," chimed in Pod Tunison.

"What ye-all so riled 'bout?" demanded a little, short, red-faced man in sailor togs, bearing down upon the group of aged paupers. "Is it mutiny, 'count of havin' t' take in sail too often, or ain't ye satisfied with th' quality of th' salt-horse? 'Vast there, Truem; clear th' decks an' let's have th' yarn in shipshape!"

"Ain't ye hearn 'bout it, Chot Kanterby?" demanded Truem.

"Ain't seen th' first signs of a squall in my direction," replied Mr. Charles Kanterby; called "Chot" for short. "Weather's clear as a bell, an' th'

barometer as stidy as a church steeple. What is it?"

"Ye'd better tell him, Jephtha Podtaker," said Truem. "You're th' most interisted, anyhow."

"Wait a minute," requested Chot.

He filled his pipe with tobacco which he cut from a plug of dark and sinister hue; and, giving a nautical hitch to his trousers, sat down on a bench which ran along the shady side of the almshouse. Then, when he had surrounded himself with a cloud of fragrant, if pungent, smoke, he motioned to Jephtha to proceed.

"For fifteen year," began Jephtha, "I've sliced all th' bread that's been eat in this here institution. For fifteen year, come April 26, I've been th' official in charge of th' loaves, an' I defy any man, woman, or child t' say I ever skimmed on th' slices."

"No more ye hev, Jephtha; no more ye hev," commented Chot, nodding his head vigorously, and puffing away like a twin-screw steamer. "I'd be th' last t' find fault with your bread slices."

"Um," said Jephtha, resuming, and leaning forward with both hands on his knees, his wrinkled face expressing his earnestness. "Waal, I allow as how I've only done my duty. Four slices t' th' loaf I've made, cuttin' 'em lengthwise, accordin' t' instructions, an' removin' th' crust on each side of th' loaf 'fore I make a cut. That's what I've done, an' I defy any man, woman, or child t' say different."

"But what's all th' trouble 'bout?"

broke in Chot. "Here ye be, backin' an' fillin' like as if ye had a greenhorn at th' wheel. Why don't ye put her 'fore th' wind an' make some progress?"

"I'm comin' t' it," said Jephtha; "only I had t' explain some things in my own way. Now, Chot Kanterby, what would ye say if ye knowed I was t' be displaced as official bread-slicer, an' a machine, that cuts six slices t' th' loaf, substituted? Hey?"

"Why," replied Chot very deliberately, carefully tamping down the ashes in his pipe, "I'd say it wa'n't t' be bore, nohow; an' we ought t' go t' th' captain. That's what we'd do aboard ship; an' it's what we ought t' do now."

"An' s'posin' th' captain, as ye call him—meanin' th' superintendent, I reckon—s'posin' he won't hear us?"

"Then there's nothin' left t' do but mutiny!" cried Chot, springing to his feet and clapping both hands on his thighs, with noises like pistol-shots. "We'll mutiny, that's what we'll do! Hurray for th' black flag an' Davy Jones' locker!"

He attempted to dance a hornpipe, but was forced, by a twinge of rheumatism that took him in the small of his back, to cease.

"Six slices t' th' loaf, eh?" repeated Chot in a dreamy tone, after a little pause. "Don't seem possible. Ain't we pinched and scrimped sufficient as 'tis now, without havin' our bread allowance shortened? Let me think this over a bit, messmates."

The others respected Chot's desire, and waited in anxious silence while he pondered over the problem. He was a sort of leader among the old men of the almshouse community. He had weathered many a storm as a deep-sea sailor, only to find himself, at last, without a port, and forced to the haven of the poorhouse.

The others, like him, had found life a failure at the close, or made it so, and had drifted into the town of Tranquillity from the surrounding hamlets, where some had lived, as boys and men, for many years. By dint of questioning, Chot obtained more details of the

affair that had so stirred the inmates of the institution.

Amos Bainbridge, the new superintendent, replacing the rather easy-going Silas Kimball, who died, had, with an eye to careful management, introduced several innovations in the conducting of the almshouse.

On a recent tour of inspecting the institution, Mr. Bainbridge had come upon Jephtha in the kitchen, slicing the loaves of bread into generous chunks, which, with a big bowl of tea or coffee, furnished the supper of the inmates.

"Rather thick, ain't they?" asked the superintendent, weighing one of the slices in his hand. It was the first time he had come upon this detail in his incumbency.

"Don't know's they be," snapped Jephtha. "No thicker'n I ever cut 'em."

"Humph!" was all Mr. Bainbridge replied as he walked off. A week later, however, he appeared in the almshouse kitchen with a mysterious machine, which he fastened to the bread-table, with the help of a mechanic who accompanied him.

The apparatus consisted of a heavy frame, holding a long, keen knife, that moved back and forward behind a board in which was an opening, through which a loaf of bread could be thrust. By moving the knife across the protruding part of the loaf, even slices could be made, their thickness regulated by set-screws, which governed the course of the knife. The machines are used in most large hotels.

"Use this hereafter," said Mr. Bainbridge to Jephtha; and, while the old man looked on, taking no care to conceal the disapproval he felt, the superintendent instructed him in the operating of the machine, explaining that in the future, six slices, instead of four, must come from each loaf.

Then the storm broke when Jephtha told his fellow inmates, which he did as soon as Mr. Bainbridge had left him, after the first lesson on the bread-cutter.

From the window of his private apartments the superintendent looked out into the yard, and saw the gather-

ing of men about Jephtha and Chot. He knew what it was about, even if the wind had not borne to him the words of Jephtha, who discoursed on his grievance in loud tones.

"Let 'em kick," said Mr. Bainbridge to his wife, who acted as matron on the women's side of the almshouse. "By the machine I can get two extra slices from each loaf, and on fifty loaves, which are used every day, that's one hundred slices, or sixteen and two-third loaves a day. I've figured it all out. At three cents a loaf, that's fifty cents a day saved, or one hundred and eighty-two dollars and fifty cents a year. I rather guess if I can show the Selectmen a saving like that, I can get an increase in salary. The machine cost me thirty-five dollars, but I can save that by it in a few months, I reckon."

"But—but," objected Mrs. Bainbridge, who was a motherly sort of woman, with a heart full of sympathy for the unfortunates under her charge, "they might be hungry with such thin slices."

"Let 'em," snapped Mr. Bainbridge. "It'll do 'em good t' want a little, and make 'em have better appetites. Besides, six slices from a loaf, instead of four, ain't unreasonable."

Down in the almshouse yard the discussion continued that day. All other grievances, real or fancied, were forgotten. The too-oft recurrence of beef-stew; the tea and coffee that were not strong enough for the old men; the rule about being in bed by nine o'clock—none of these seemed of any account now, in the face of the fact that the bread allowance was to be reduced.

True, it was not much. Probably the difference of cutting six, instead of four, slices from a loaf would not make the chunks smaller by more than a quarter of an inch. They had been getting slices an inch thick, and now they would get them three-quarters of an inch thick. And very likely there was sufficient nourishment in these thinner slices, two of which went to an inmate.

But to the old people, many of them almost childish, it seemed like a great wrong and imposition. And so the revolt grew, and the men increased their boldness of attitude in objection the more they thought over the matter.

"Somethin's got t' be done," Chot declared, his usually jovial face grim. "We must speak t' th' old man. We must go t' th' quarter-deck an' lay th' case afore him, an' give him a chanst t' right th' wrong. That's what'd be done aboard ship, as I've seen many a time. Now th' thing t' do is t' draw lots, an' see who'll do th' talkin'."

"You'd be th' best," spoke Jephtha; "havin' a sort of gift that way."

"Waal," remarked Chot slowly, and not altogether displeased at the acknowledgment of his talent and the importance of the task, "I'm not goin' t' deny my nateral gifts, an' if there's no objections——"

"You're th' one," chorused several.

"All right, then, I'll do it," agreed Chot. "But ye-all hev t' stand by me, in case we hev t' mutiny."

"We will!" exclaimed the twenty-three old men.

Thereupon Chot took the whole company of revolvers down behind the shadow of an ancient gnarled apple-tree, out of sight and hearing of the superintendent's windows, and administered to each one a dire and dreadful oath of faith and fealty. Some trembled as they took it, but not a one faltered.

"Now we must see t' th' womin folks," said Chot. "'Tain't strictly reg'lar an' shipshape, but I reckon we can stretch a p'int. We'll stand by them ef they stand by us. We must sink or swim together."

That evening, under pretense of getting her to mend some socks, which was the duty Alvirah Anderson performed for the old men, Chot whispered the news to her. She was startled by the boldness of the plan, but promised to arouse the twenty-seven women of the institution to action. Her presentment of the case to them next day was successful, and when the oath had been administered

to them, one by one, by Aunt Alvira, after a careful drilling by Chot, the revolt was in full sway.

"We ought t' hev a flag an' adopt a motto," said the leader to his male forces. "A banner with a loaf of bread, cut int' four slices, an' readin': 'All we seek is jestic,' would be appropriate. But, under th' circumstances, we can dispense with it. Remember, men, not a word of this here must be whispered t' an outsider, for, as our oath says, 'we are bound t'gether by bonds tighter'n walrus-hide strips, an' Davy Jones' locker is a-yawnin' an' a-hungerin' for whoever is false; an' may he never be near a scuttle-butt, though he ain't had nothin' t' drink for a month!' So be careful."

"What d'ye cal'late on doin' in case th' superintendent don't let ye hev yer own way?" asked Sabina Parker, the oldest inmate of the almshouse, regarded as a sort of censor, by right of long residence.

"Mutiny, of course!" exclaimed Chot.

"Meanin'?"

"Meanin' we'll refuse t' eat th' six-sliced bread."

"An' starve," commented Sabina dryly.

"We'll bring 'em t' terms," vowed Chot. "They can't shorten our rations with impunity."

The next day was set for the appeal to Mr. Bainbridge, and breakfast was the hour decided upon, for at this meal the superintendent usually made it a practise to be present and look over his charges. He was sure to be on hand this time, as it was the occasion set by him for beginning the use of the new bread-cutting machine.

From early dawn it was evident that something was in the wind. But if Mr. Bainbridge suspected anything as he made ready for his visit, he said nothing. Every inmate was on time when the bell rang to assemble for breakfast, and a minute later they all filed into the big room, and took their places at the tables.

The tea and coffee were steaming in big pots. In a basket in one corner of

the room were many loaves of bread, ready to be sliced. Near-by on a table was the patent slicer.

The superintendent had not yet come down, but Jephtha was in his accustomed place. He had his old knife in readiness; the knife with which, for years, he had cut the loaves into four sections. He glanced with contemptuous eyes at the hated machine. Then he would look down at something he had concealed under the table, and a smile would steal over his wrinkled features.

"Good morning," said Mr. Bainbridge, entering suddenly.

There was no response, but every eye was on Chot. The old sailor rose in his chair, and advanced toward the superintendent. He bowed awkwardly, and pulled his scanty wisp of hair in the regulation style. The almshouse inmates nodded in approval.

"I've made bold t' come aft t' th' quarter-deck, sir," began Chot; "bein' delegated—er—that is—bein' selected t' make a—er—a protest on th' part of my mates."

"Eh! What's this? What's this?" exclaimed Mr. Bainbridge. "What's the trouble?"

"Bread's th' trouble, sir," replied Chot firmly. "Bread!"

"Isn't it good enough for you?" asked the superintendent somewhat sneeringly.

"Plenty, sir," said Chot. "Maybe better'n we deserve, but we understand you've got a machine that cuts six slices t' th' loaf, instid of four. Now, sir, we come respectful, but we come firm. We're charges on this here community of Tranquillity; an', strictly speakin', we're a burden an' a trial, an' no one knows it better'n we do, an' th' feelin' ain't none too pleasant, particular t' me, sir, as has allers earned his livin' till th' rheumatiz got too much for me.

"But if we be paupers, which fact none of us denies, we hev some rights, an' we're entitled t' some jestic. We don't ask much. We appreciate all th' Selectmen has done for us, an' we're thankful t' 'em. Th' Lord knows none

of us'd be here if we could help it. 'Tis bitter t' feel ye can't earn a honest penny no more. But, be that as 'tis, I have this t' say." And his voice, that had quavered a bit, rang out:

"We teetotally an' entirely refuse t' eat or hev anythin' t' do with th' six-sliced loaves, an' we hev, each one of us, man an' woman, collectively, singly, individually, and severally, covenanted and agreed, an' by these here presents do hereby firmly protest agin' th' imposition of th' same, given under our hands an' seals!"

Chot was becoming excited now, for he had struck some phrases from old shipping agreements he possessed, and which he had conned in anticipation of the event of making his speech.

"An'," he went on, raising his fist in the air, "if this is forced on us, we'll revolt an' mutiny. There shall be no taxation without representation, equal rights for all, an' special privileges for none; an' th' motto of our flag, which we didn't hev time t' make, reads: 'All we seek is jestic.' United we stand, divided we fall. That's all now, sir, Mr. Amos Bainbridge, respected superintendent; an' we hope it'll be enough." And, pulling his foretop again, Chot shuffled back to his seat.

Surprise and resentment struggled for supremacy on the face of the superintendent. He started to speak, but a movement at the rear of the room took his attention in that direction.

"Them sentiments, so nobly spoke by Chot Kanterby, is th' sentiments of all on us," cried Jephtha. "We've got some rights, though we do eat th' bread of poverty; but that same bread sha'n't be cut by a machine while Jephtha Podtaker has his good right arm. Stand back, everybody, an' give me room! *Who! Wheel!*"

There was a sudden movement near Jephtha, and the men and women circled back from him, as, from beneath the table the official bread-cutter of Tranquillity Poorhouse drew a heavy sledge-hammer he had borrowed from a near-by blacksmith shop the night before.

"Down with machine-cut bread!" cried Jephtha. And he swung the sledge about his head with a strength he scarcely seemed capable of. Once, twice, thrice it circled.

"Stop him, somebody! He'll break that machine!" cried Mr. Bainbridge.

The words came too late, even if any one had desired to interfere with Jephtha. With a last swing to the heavy hammer, the old man brought it down with crushing force on the bread-slicing machine, bursting it into scores of pieces.

The silence that succeeded the crash was almost as startling as the noise had been. Mr. Bainbridge turned pale, and seemed about to retreat from the room, as though he feared an attack would next be made on him.

"There won't be no bread cut with that contraption," remarked Jephtha calmly, though his breathing was a little labored as he laid aside the hammer and took up his old knife. He began his customary work, making four slices to the loaf. "A mutiny may be all right," he went on, half to himself, "but my way's more sure, though I ain't denyin' Chot made a good talk."

For a little while there was a painful suspense, no one knowing what to do. Then, without a word, the superintendent turned, and went back to his apartments. His wife observed that something had occurred to startle him.

"How did they take to your new machine?" she asked.

"There isn't any machine now," said Mr. Bainbridge dryly, for, with all his faults, he was a man of common sense, and just, though to the letter rather than the spirit of the law.

He sat down to his own breakfast, and paused before he took one of the eggs his wife offered him.

"And I rather guess," he went on slowly, "that, from the way they took to this machine, there won't be another."

And to this day the inmates of Tranquillity Poorhouse eat bread cut with a knife, four slices to the loaf.

In the Cause of Freedom

By Arthur W. Marchmont

Author of "The Eternal Snare," "When I Was Czar," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

Robert Anstruther, an Englishman visiting Count Ladislas Tuleski in Russian Poland, becomes acquainted with Volna Drakona, a young girl whose uncle, Count Peter Valdemar, is a famous Polish conspirator. While Count Valdemar is out driving with Volna his carriage is upset and he is killed. Robert Anstruther comes to Volna's aid and they take possession of certain papers which Count Valdemar was carrying to friends of the Polish Freedom Fraternity in Cracow. Volna declares that her mother's life is in danger unless the papers are delivered, and she and Anstruther start for Cracow under the names of Robert and Margaret (Peggy) Garrett, assuming the characters of two of Anstruther's friends whose passports he carries. They are pursued, and after many adventures they reach the village of Kervatje, and are given shelter by Father Ambrose, who advises Anstruther to give himself up to the authorities, thus saving Volna from arrest. Anstruther agrees to the scheme, but when he is taking leave of Volna, to whom the plot has not been divulged, she demands that she be taken into their confidence and threatens to go to the police herself and surrender.

CHAPTER XIII—(Continued).



"Y dear child," protested the priest.

"I will. I will. My mind is made up," Volna declared.

"You had better tell her," I said to the priest then.

Father Ambrose then told her the scheme in regard to my arrest, and we both enlarged upon the absence of risk to me.

She neither acquiesced nor vetoed it. "That's number one," she nodded. "What is number two? What have you told Mr. Anstruther?"

"You want to rule with a pretty strong iron rod, don't you?" I said. "But there is nothing to tell that need be told."

"Tell me," she cried to Father Ambrose. "I will know, or——"

"I only told him such facts about you as you had told me," said the priest, taking refuge in generalities.

She stood thinking, shooting quick, inquiring glances at us in turn.

"I ask you not to insist on anything more than that," I urged.

A gleam of understanding was in her eyes, and a semi-mischievous smile hovering about her lips as she returned: "Who asked that?"

"Bob Garrett," I declared promptly.

The smile deepened. "What will the police do with him?" she asked Father Ambrose. "Take him to Cracow?"

"More probably to Warsaw," was the reply; "but as we told you, his friends will see he comes to no harm of any sort. You are quite sure of that, are you not, Mr. Anstruther?"

"I haven't the faintest doubt of it."

At this Volna looked quite her happy self.

"I may as well put these on again, then," she said, and she slipped on the apron and arranged the quaint head-dress. When she looked at me again her face was almost preternaturally grave, except for her expressive eyes.

"You see now what a lot of time would have been saved if you had been frank like Bob, and not tried to deceive me, like Mr. Anstruther. I can say good-by, just as formally as you

please, now I know why you are going."

I took her hand and pressed it. "You'll stay here and let this thing go through all right?"

"Yes. Father Ambrose wishes it. Good-by, Mr. Anstruther, and good-by—Bob."

"Good-by—Peggy. I may say that for the last time."

"Yes, for the last time, of course. I am Volna after to-day." She looked at me with an odd, inscrutable expression in her eyes, and smiled. "You'll be all right, or else I shouldn't agree. But I know you, and I am sure."

Then I hurried out of the room, followed by the priest.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ARREST.

As it was desirable for the success of our plan that I should not be seen when I fetched my horse, the priest pointed out a way across the fields; and then gave me a great surprise.

"Considering what you are doing, I must trust you with a dangerous secret," he began. "You will give me your honor never to reveal it?"

I gave him the pledge readily.

"The owner of the shed where you left the horses is named Jacob Posen. He may have found the horses, and may raise difficulties. In that case, you will say to him: 'I am a peasant farmer, friend.' He will probably reply: 'You seem in a hurry?' You will answer: 'Immediate.' His next question, if he asks it, will be: 'Your name?' In reply you will raise your left hand with the forefinger extended, the tip to be level with your eyes, and the back of the hand toward him, and say: 'In the eye of God.' He will then offer to shake hands with you; but you will refuse and look steadily at him. He will then be ready to help you." He illustrated the peculiar gesture.

The inner significance of this was not difficult to see. "Peasant farmer, friend" clearly stood for "P. F. F."—the Polish Freedom Fraternity. The

word "Immediate" was for one with a similar initial—probably Independence; while the gesture was for recognition purposes with a subtle reference to the righteousness of the cause and the far-reaching extent of the movement.

I was profoundly impressed by the incident. Here I was in a little village, far removed from the busy cities where revolution has its birth and conspiracy is cradled; and yet, the ramifications were so widespread, the arrangements so perfected, and the secret means so ready to hand, that Father Ambrose—as mild a mannered man as ever wore a priest's stole—was able in a few minutes to find one agent to carry the dangerous papers to Cracow, and then another to help me in my scheme.

Until then I had never regarded the Fraternity as a serious national force—my opinion being influenced by the fact that my friend, Count Ladislas, was one of the leaders.

I knew him for a man whose habit of mind led him to shirk responsibility, to act on impulse, to be swayed by the last word, and to veer this way and that when a decision had to be made. It was impossible to think of him as leading a movement which called for practical, earnest, and sustained effort, for the resolute overcoming of innumerable difficulties, the persistent, steady, battling against odds, and the uninterrupted, unceasing educative work needed here.

He was a man of dreams, ideas, theories, and principles; and here were the results of steady action, hard work, stern realities, and tireless practise.

I seemed to realize for the first time how real was the danger from which Volna had to be saved, and how grave the risk to which her friends in Warsaw had so thoughtlessly exposed her.

Even if our little scheme now were successful and I managed to lead the police off her track, there was serious reason to fear that fresh danger might await her in Warsaw; and at that moment a thought occurred to me, and, despite the seriousness of things, I laughed aloud.

In our last interview she had shown a dozen moods in as many sentences,

to my infinite bewilderment; but I now thought of something which had escaped me at the moment. Her cheerfulness had returned when she knew I was likely to be taken to Warsaw.

Will any one blame me if in my egoism I interpreted this as a sign that she hoped we should meet again there? We had parted for always and said a last good-by; but she had taken the parting lightly, because the "always" would last only until we were both in Warsaw. That was why I laughed.

The laughter had a short life, however. It died suddenly, as I remembered how Father Ambrose had spoken of Volna's betrothal. There was something more than I knew of in that; Volna herself had spoken of an entanglement; and I was worrying over the puzzle when I reached the top of a sloping meadow and saw below me the shed I was seeking.

There was no one about as I hurried down the hill. I was glad, as I had no mind for the indulgence in cabalistic signs, and all the rest of it.

But I had been seen; and as I was unfastening the door a man came round the end of the shed.

"Well?" A very blunt but significant monosyllable.

"Are you Jacob Posen?" He nodded. He was a big, heavy, black-bearded, powerful man.

"I have come for my horse."

"What do you mean? This is my barn. I have no horse of yours."

"I am a peasant farmer, friend."

He laughed, giving no sign that he understood; but he was only acting, for he said, with a sneer: "You seem in a hurry."

"Immediate."

His laugh changed to a scowl, and he growled, in a tone of almost savage anger: "Your name?" I was almost surprised an oath did not follow.

I made the sign and answered: "In the eye of God."

His face changed suddenly, and affecting an air of good fellowship he thrust out his hand. I refused it, and just looked him in the face.

His taciturn expression returned, and he opened the door of the barn.

"I saw you put them both in, and wondered," he said. "Shall I fetch the saddle, or will you?"

"Better you; I don't wish to be seen."

"Both?"

"No, mine only. Hide the other and the horse."

He went off at once, leaving me marveling more than ever. He was soon back, and himself slipped on the saddle and bridle. Nothing more was said until I was ready to mount.

"What shall I do with the other horse?" he asked.

"It mustn't be found twenty miles west of here; and this revolver must be hidden," I added, as I gave him the weapon I had taken at Schirmskad.

"I understand. God keep us all!"

"God keep us all!" I repeated, assuming that to be another secret sign. As I rode off, I saw him return to the coppice where the other saddle was, and carry it back to the barn.

I rode leisurely in the direction of the village, on the lookout for some sign of the police, and running over in my mind the story I should tell.

Such of the villagers as were about gaped at me, and two or three children followed. As I was playing a part, and did not know whose eyes might be upon me, I thought it best to play thoroughly.

"Which is the priest's house?" I asked one of the women; and she pointed it out. I beckoned to the children, and, throwing them some copecks, bade them tell the father I wished to speak to him.

He came out, and I raised my hat and said, in a voice loud enough for others to hear: "I am the Englishman who passed through the village yesterday and spoke with you, father. I have had all my money taken from me, and have thought it best to come to you."

"Come into the house," he said gravely.

As I dismounted and fastened my horse to the railing, he drew a woman

aside and whispered to her; then led the way to the door.

"I have sent for the police agents," he explained. "They have been some thirty minutes in the village."

"I am quite ready," I said. As we sat waiting, I told him hurriedly what had passed with Jacob Posen, and that I thought Volna's horse should be hidden.

"Do you really need any money?" he asked.

"No, I think not. I shall get back my letter of credit."

Soon we heard footsteps outside.

"They are here. I almost regret this," he said hurriedly.

"I think it splendid. Now for the play." Then I raised my voice, and spoke excitedly. "The men took my letter of credit, and if you do not help me, what am I to do? Some one shall pay for this." I got up and held the door partly open. "If you can't do it, you can't, of course; but I daren't stay here."

"You cannot go," said the father. "I have sent for the police."

"Not go? I'll see about that," I cried angrily, and rushed out, to be instantly seized by my friend of the Devil's Staircase and a companion.

"No, no; we'll see about your going," sneered the fellow. "You're right, Father Ambrose, this is the man we seek. Thank you for keeping him here and sending for us."

"Ah! so it's you again, eh?" I said.

"Yes; and you won't get away this time."

I turned on the priest viciously. "And this is your idea of Christianity, eh? To get me inside your house in order to betray me to the hounds! I wish you joy of your creed."

"Don't insult the father. He has only done his duty." The irony of the praise for the falsehood we had acted together struck the good man, and I saw him wince.

"I have done what I have done," he murmured.

"See if he's armed," ordered the agent. "He stole my revolver."

"Your comrades took it from me in

their turn. You'll find it at Schirmskad. I'm not armed. I don't need weapons any longer."

"Schirmskad?" He looked up, scowling.

I laughed significantly. "On my way to the frontier. You're too late, my friend; and within the next few hours I am going to show you what a fool you've made of yourself."

"Where's the woman?"

"Wire to Schirmskad and ask who escaped when the cottage of the woodcutter, Krempel, was burned down last night. You know how near that is to the frontier." (I did not, but I bluffed him.)

"Did he ride up alone?" he asked Father Ambrose.

"Yes, at the moment I sent for you."

"You'll answer for this," he cried angrily.

"That's exactly what I've ridden back for. Your fellows at that cottage took my money and papers; so, as soon as I had done what I set out to do, I rode back. On my way I came to this priest here. He knows I am an Englishman. But instead of helping me, he arranged for my arrest. You Russian Poles are a nice friendly Christian people; the whole lot of you."

"Where were you going?"

"Why, to Bratinsk, of course—where the rest of my things are, and where I am well enough known to borrow money until I can get some from England."

"A likely story," he sneered.

"You needn't believe it. Your sneers don't affect me a copeck. This particular episode being closed, I am going back to my hunting at Bratinsk."

"You'll find that the 'episode,' as you call it, isn't closed. You'll have to answer for it, and must come with me."

"I haven't the least objection now."

He thanked Father Ambrose again, and we left the house. They walked one on each side of me, and one of the villagers led my horse. In this way I was marched to the police quarters of the village—just a cottage.

There he wanted to catechize me afresh about Volna; but I stopped him.

"I shall say nothing about that and nothing more about myself. I am ready to go wherever you please to take me, and, having no longer any reason to resist, will do what you wish. You know who I am, because you saw my papers at Bratinsk before any of this fuss occurred. Take me to your superiors, and I'll convince them in half an hour that the sooner I am at liberty again, the better for all concerned."

"I am in charge of this," he cried, bristling with authority. "You have aided the escape of a revolutionary, and must answer for it."

"I am an Englishman. Take me to your superiors," I said. And to that phrase I stuck, repeating it doggedly to his every question, until I had tired out his patience and worn his temper to shreds.

I was then left in a room, with a man to guard me. Subsequently a carriage was got ready, and I was handcuffed and bundled into it pretty roughly. I knew the road, of course, and soon saw they were taking me to Solden,

I was carried to the police quarters there and shut up in a cell; still with a man to guard me. Meanwhile they communicated with the police at Schirmskad; and after some time I was taken from the cell and confronted with the chief of the men who had nearly captured me at the wood-cutter's cottage.

"I am glad to see you," I told him. "You have my passport, papers, and letter of credit. I demand their return."

"Where is your companion, and who is she?"

"Who is the chief here?" I asked.

"Answer me, you dog!" he cried, with an oath, raising his hand.

"I am an Englishman with very powerful friends; no mere peasant to be kicked and hounded by you. Lay a finger on me, if you dare."

The two conferred together; my papers were taken out and examined; and a third man called to the conference.

"Where is your companion, and who is she?" demanded the man again.

"Take me to your superiors," I said.

And from that reply I would not be moved.

At last I was sent back to the cell with the guard to watch me as before.

I was getting on better than I had even hoped. My insistent repetition of the fact that I was an Englishman had had its effect.

The Warsaw agent who had seen me first at Bratinsk had no doubt satisfied himself on the point; and from what I had seen in the recent conference, he had made this clear to the others.

My chief anxiety was about food. It was now late in the afternoon, and, having had nothing since the breakfast at the priest's house, I was very hungry. I recalled my experience at Pulta station, and began to speculate what effect a gold coin would have upon my guard. He was a heavy, stupid-looking fellow; but the biggest fool in Russia knows the difference between a gold piece and a copeck.

The coins in my pocket had not been taken from me, and, although I was still handcuffed, I was able to wriggle my hand into my pocket. The man watched me sullenly.

"I am hungry," I said.

"Prisoners mustn't talk."

"I have had no food for hours. Wouldn't this buy some?" and I held up a couple of rubles.

"Silence," he growled, with a surly frown.

I substituted a gold piece for the two silver ones. "Food is perhaps dear in Solden."

He fidgeted uneasily, his eyes on the gold. I put the three coins together. "The silver for the food, the gold for the waiter," I said.

He sighed regretfully. "Impossible," he murmured.

"Mayn't you buy food for yourself? Have you had supper?"

His eyes gleamed. A slow smile of cunning spread over his face. He stretched out his hand. I put the two silver coins into it. "One pays the waiter at the end of dinner."

He was disappointed, and stood glancing from the coins in the palm of his hand to me and back from me to the

coins. Then he decided to earn the gold.

He knocked on the door of the cell, and a comrade came. They whispered together; the coins jingled; and the comrade departed.

In half an hour he returned with some food—a cold chicken, some bread, and tea. The cost was probably under a ruble, and the comrade had thus paid himself in advance.

There was no knife, so I had to eat the fowl as best I could, pulling the joints asunder and gnawing the flesh. But I was too hungry to bother about that. When I had finished, I gave the man the gold piece.

"I must give *him* something," he grumbled.

"Give him what you like out of that," I answered, getting a very black look from the fellow.

After the food, sleep became insistent. I had not slept since Pulta, and had done a good deal in the meantime. I was as tired as a hound after a long day, and had scarcely settled myself on the bench against the corner of the wall before I was off.

Not for long, however. I dreamed that some huge monster animal was suffocating me, and awoke to find it was my guard's heavy coat sleeve pressing against my face as he leaned across to get at the pocket where my money was.

"Helping yourself, are you?"

He got up hurriedly, and a couple of coins fell from his hand to the floor.

"I only wanted to see you were comfortable," he mumbled.

"You thought the money might make too big a lump for comfort, eh? Very nice of you. Your officer counted it, so you can tell him how much you've taken. It'll be all right."

He swore—perhaps at the feebleness of the sarcasm; but he thrust the money back and sat down in his chair again, glowering at me.

I settled myself in my corner once more, and slept this time until somebody shook me violently.

It was my friend of the Devil's Stair-

case; and he bade me get up at once and go with him.

I yawned. "Where to?"

"To my superiors," he answered, with a grin; thinking it a joke, no doubt, to throw my own words back at me.

CHAPTER XV.

A TASTE OF PRISON LIFE.

Outside in the corridor the man from Schirmskad was waiting, and the two drove me to the railway-station and hustled me into a railway-carriage. They would not say where I was being taken, but I did not care much, and five minutes after I entered the train I was fast asleep.

When I awoke it was daylight—a bleak, desolate, gray morning, for the snow had come at last, and was falling heavily. I was cold and stiff from the cramped position, and sore from the jolting of the train—one never understands how a train *can* jolt until after an experience in what they call a fast train in Russian Poland—and as I sat up, yawned, and rubbed my eyes, every bone in my body seemed to ache.

My guards were both asleep. Had I been minded, I could have taken their weapons and shot them both as they rolled in their corners, snoring loudly enough to have drowned the sound of the shots.

I roused them both, and with a great show of politeness told them what I could have done. They both swore at me.

"It's really very wrong of you to go to sleep in such a case," I said amiably. "You had no right to subject a prisoner to such a temptation. I fear I shall be compelled to report you."

"You're a cool hand," growled the Schirmskad man.

"Not nearly so cold as *you* would soon have been if I had done it," I retorted; and the grimness of the joke seemed to appeal to them. "But, you see, I am merciful. Yet, one of you took me for a spy, or a conspirator, and the other for a thief or a murderer. It was brilliant."

"Who are you, then?" growled the Warsaw man. They were both sleepy and ill-tempered, and thus very easy to bait.

"If I had been either spy or murderer," I continued, "I suppose even you can see that I should have shot you just now instead of going on contentedly to explain things."

The train ran through a station then, and I caught sight of the name Tischnov. I knew the place to be some twenty miles from Warsaw. I began to chuckle, and presently burst into a loud laugh.

"What is it now?"

"I'm thinking of your promotion," I grinned. "They tell me that the man who makes the biggest mistakes gets promoted instantly for fear the blunder should be known and police prestige suffer. I expect you'll be heads of departments by to-morrow, you two, with decorations."

"We've had enough of your insolence."

"You asked me why I smiled. Why, when your minister of the interior hears from my dear old friend, General von Eckerstein—he used to represent Germany at Petersburg, you know—how you've treated me, you'll get such a sweet message from him!"

The Schirmskad man swore, but his companion looked serious. I continued to chaff them with much enjoyment for ten miles; and the Warsaw agent grew more and more uneasy at every word I dropped relative to my having well-known friends.

"What do you know about General von Eckerstein?" he asked at length.

"That he doesn't like his friends to wear this kind of ornament." I held up my handcuffs.

"If you'll give me your word not to escape, I'll take them off," he replied, very sheepishly.

"Not for the world, now. I shall be able to tell the general how it feels to be dragged through the streets of Warsaw manacled like a felon."

The two whispered together for some minutes, then the Warsaw man said:

"We're not afraid of your escaping. I'll take them off."

I let him do it, of course. "It's beginning to dawn on you at last that I'm not a dangerous revolutionary?" I said, as I rubbed my chafed wrists. "You're only at the beginning of your lesson, though."

"I have done no more than my duty," he muttered.

"We shall see about that before the day's over, my friend," I answered sharply.

When we reached Warsaw I was driven to the police quarters. I was expected, and after a few minutes I was taken to a room where some half-dozen men were awaiting me, among them being the two who had brought me to Warsaw. The chief was sitting at a table strewn with papers.

"Stand there," he said, pointing to a spot opposite to him.

Two things were evident. The chief was a man high in authority—the deferential manner of the rest showed this—and the proceedings were stage-managed with a view to impress me with the solemnity and seriousness of the occasion.

I took my cue accordingly, and was as nonchalant as I could be. "Why stand?" I asked.

"You are a prisoner," he rapped out, with a frown.

"On what charge?"

"Don't question me. Your name?"

I looked at him steadily and kept silent. The frown deepened, and he repeated: "Your name; do you hear?"

"Of course I hear you; but if I am a prisoner I decline to answer any questions until I know the charge against me."

"Don't trifle with me. Refuse to answer and you go to the cells."

"That as you please. Your agent there knows my name perfectly well, and that I am a British subject. I claim my rights as one."

The reply only served to increase his anger. The flesh about his nose and mouth began to grow white, as it will with some men in passion. He was a

bully, and probably hated the English like so many of his countrymen.

"Answer me, you——" The epithet was lost in the loud cough of a man near him.

"You have the only answer I shall give until I know the charge."

"Take him away," he ordered, with a wave of the hand.

"I demand the right to communicate with the British consul," I said; "and with my friend, General von Eckerstein."

"Take him away," he repeated; and I was led off and placed in a cell. If he thought to frighten me, the effort failed. He had put himself in the wrong, and I knew that my turn would come.

It was a filthy, foul-smelling place they put me in; and they kept me there all day without food or even water.

In the evening I was taken again before the man, and the scene of the morning was repeated in pretty much the same terms and with the same result. But my back was up, and I vowed I'd rather starve than give in.

I passed a miserable night, hungry, parched with thirst, and half stifled with the reeking foulness of the place.

In the morning an official came to the cell to try a different method. He was less of a ruffian than his superior, and sought to convince me of the uselessness of contumacy.

I let him talk without once replying to his questions until he was in the act of leaving. "I am a British subject," I said then, "and I have demanded no more than my rights. I have been treated like a dog and shut up in this filthy place to be starved into submission to that ruffianly bully. Go through with it, if you dare! I can keep my end up, and be hanged to you all! But if I'm left to rot here, there'll be questions which somebody will find it difficult to answer. You can't murder foreigners with impunity. You know that."

He shrugged his shoulders, hesitated whether to answer, then decided not to, and went away.

A couple of hours later I was taken

again to be examined, and the man who had visited me was with the bully.

"Is your name Robert Anstruther?" asked the latter.

"You knew that before you sentenced me to twenty-four hours' starvation."

"Are you prepared now to explain your part in this business?"

"What business? What do you charge me with?"

His colleague bent and whispered to him; and a short but very heated altercation followed, which resulted in the bully ordering the other man out of the room.

Then he turned to me. "You'll have to answer me."

"We shall see about that," I returned.

"I shall jail you till you do."

"Then we shall both be a good deal older when we meet again," I retorted.

"You have a fancy to try a change of prisons."

"I demand the right to see the British consul and to communicate with my friends."

"Your friends, now. Who are they?" he sneered.

"One will do to start with—his excellency, General von Eckerstein, of the German legation at Petersburg. I wish him to know that you have tried to starve me to submit to your infernal bullying."

"Insolent English beast!" he roared, completely losing his head in the fury. "Take the liar away!" he commanded.

"I sha'n't always be a prisoner," I cried, as the man seized me. "But I shall remember that insult until I've made you swallow the words."

I was nearly as furious as he; but I had no time to say more, for the men hustled me violently out of the room.

They passed on word that I might be ill-treated with impunity; and I had a very rough-and-tumble time indeed while being carried to one of the jails.

With the minor police and jail officials in Russian Poland, the ill-treatment of prisoners is a carefully studied art; and they amused themselves congenially with me.

Twenty times on that short journey

I had to put the greatest restraint on myself to resist the temptation to do what they strove to goad me to do—to commit some act of violence which would have given them the excuse they sought to half batter me to death.

As it was, I was hustled, struck, and kicked; my clothes were nearly torn off my back, and every foul epithet which Russian and Polish malice could think of was flung at me with official brutality and contemptuousness.

I kept my head, however. I was tough enough to bear a good deal of ill-treatment; I had often taken much worse punishment in the boxing-ring, and I had played football in America, so I held my temper back for the man who was the real cause of it all.

At length they thrust me into a cell and locked the door upon me, with a last gibe that the English were dirty cowards, and I the meanest skunk of them all.

I understood that day how men are made murderers. I brooded over my wrongs and nursed my rage against the bully who was responsible for this treatment, until if we had stood face to face I know I should have found delight in dragging him down and choking the life out of him.

A fierce desire to fight him and punish him took possession of me; and for an hour or two hunger, thirst, injustice, everything was forgotten in that all but insane craving for revenge.

But rage cannot last forever, and when some rough prison food—gruel, black bread, and a pannikin of water—was thrust into my cell an hour or two later, the sight of it roused my hunger anew and blanketed my passion. So famished was I by this time that I had to struggle hard against the desperate impulse to cram the food into my mouth with the unbridled voracity of a starving beast.

It was excellent self-discipline to eat it slowly. But I succeeded. I took it, just a mouthful at a time, with long intervals between, thus spreading out the meal over perhaps two hours or more. And at the end of the time I was myself once more, had regained

my self-restraint, and was able to think.

What they meant to do with me I could not see; but what I would do was clear enough. I would conform to every rule of the prison life and wait for the chance of communicating with my friend or with the British consul.

On entering the jail I had been searched, and my watch and money, everything, indeed, taken from me. I could not, therefore, try the bribery trick again, even if the chance had offered. So I made the best of a very bad job, arranged my torn clothes in such fashion as I could, rubbed the bruises where the brutes had kicked or struck me, and got all the sleep that was possible.

The attempt to starve me was abandoned, and later in the day another meal—black bread and water this time—was served. I was left to myself that day and the whole of the next, except when the food was brought, or when I was ordered roughly to clean the cell, or when a warder in the corridor would open the grill in the door, and, after grinning at me, utter some vile epithet. They were a genial, pleasant set of men!

On the third day, however, a fresh course was attempted. A man I had not seen before entered my cell, and, after very little preface, hinted that if I would pay him, he would carry some communication to my friends. Suspicious that it was a trick, I declined; and then he urged me to make a full confession of all I knew, and submit to the authorities.

"What do you call this but submitting?" I retorted. "I don't see what other course is left to me. But I have done nothing, and have no confession to make, therefore."

"By submission, I mean answer the questions of Colonel Bremenhof."

"Is that the man who interrogated me?"

"Yes. Will you not confess to——"

"I have no confession to make," I cut in. "But I'm glad to know his name. I sha'n't forget it."

He tried to work on my fears then.

This was not England, the times were troubled, military laws prevailed, and suspects who would not account for themselves might be treated very harshly.

"I have had ample proof of that myself, thank you," said I dryly; "and as soon as I am free, I shall see that some others learn to spell the word."

He gave me up then, and left with a curt warning: "You will not be free until you have submitted."

It began to look as though it was to be a trial of staying power; and I had all that day and half the next to ponder his warning.

Then something happened.

I had had my midday meal and was trying to sleep, when I heard the shuffling of steps and the murmur of voices in the corridor.

There was a pause, the key was thrust into the lock, the door thrown open, and two warders entered, followed by the bully, and, of all people in the world, the least expected—Volna.

CHAPTER XVI.

OVER THE TELEPHONE.

At the sight of the man who had used his official power to give me the lie, and then treated me like a felon, my rage flashed at once into a flame.

But for that, my astonishment at seeing Volna would have drawn some sign of recognition before my instinctive caution could have prevented it. As it was, however, my gaze fastened on Colonel Bremenhof.

"It's you, is it?" I said, and I jumped up and stepped toward him.

He retreated, and the two warders interposed quickly and pushed me back. But the incident had served a purpose. It prevented the bully's noticing Volna's start of dismay on recognizing me.

"That's right," I sneered. "Keep your bulldogs about you. It's not safe to come near me without some one to take care of you."

His anger and chagrin were intense. I knew afterward what he had hoped to

gain by bringing Volna to my cell; and the failure of the plan galled him.

"This is the fellow, Volna, who was found with your uncle——" he began, when I broke in:

"Have you communicated with my friend, General von Eckerstein?"

"Silence, prisoner!" he cried angrily.

"Now, Volna, I want you——"

"Am I a show for all Warsaw to see? I have suffered your brutality——"

"Silence, I say! Disobedient scoundrels get the lash here."

"You miserable coward!" I exploded. "A mere cur in office, barking only when you think it safe."

This had the infuriating effect I wished. He lost control of himself, and, pushing the two warders aside, rushed forward with hand raised to strike me.

I let him come quite close, and then hit him full on his insolent mouth, putting all my weight and strength behind the blow. He went down like a nine-pin; and, so far as he was concerned, the interview was over.

A pretty considerable row followed. The two warders threw themselves on me and shouted lustily for help. Others rushed to the cell in a ferment of excitement, and clustered between me and the bully, much as though I were a wild beast. He was carried off, and Volna, in a maze of distress and consternation, was taken away at the same time.

I was now considered to be a desperate and dangerous prisoner. Handcuffs were placed on my wrists, and irons on my legs, neither of the operations being gently performed.

I was huddled upon my pallet in the exceedingly uncomfortable position which the irons permitted, when the governor of the jail and a couple of other officials entered with some warders.

He read me a short lecture upon the heinousness of my awful offense, told me that men had been killed who had done less, and then announced that my punishment would be the knout—three hundred lashes to be administered at

intervals of a week, a hundred lashes each time.

"I am an Englishman," I affirmed, "and claim the right to communicate with the British consul, and also my friend, General von Eckerstein."

"You don't dare to deny that you struck Colonel Bremenhof?" was the retort.

"My quarrel is personal with him. He sent me here in the first instance without any cause, and was going to strike me just now when I hit him."

"Enough," was the stern reply. "You have admitted your infamous act. The first portion of your punishment will be administered to-morrow." With that he turned on his heel and left me to my own reflections, which were gloomy enough.

I had once seen a man knouted, and had winced as the lash tore the flesh from the poor devil's back. I would rather have been sentenced to be shot at once; and for a few mad moments I indulged in wild thoughts of self-destruction or of attempting a fierce attack on some one in the prison which would bring a capital sentence.

Sanity returned presently, however, and after a time the extraordinary circumstances of Volna's visit began to claim my thoughts.

What baffled me as much as anything was that Colonel Bremenhof had addressed her by her first name. What could he be to her, or she to him?

He had evidently brought her to the prison to identify me; but what could be his motive? Could she have fallen under suspicion? What did he know, and how had he guessed that she and I had been together? Had she been confronted with the police agent of the Devil's Staircase incident? Was she to be charged? That did not seem possible, in view of the fact that she was apparently free and he had spoken to her as to a friend.

I raked my wits over and over again in repeated attempts to answer these questions, only to give up the puzzle as hopeless.

No one came near me again all that afternoon and evening, and, as the

hours passed, the thought of what was in store for me on the morrow became more and more oppressive. And when, at length, I heard the warders going their night rounds, I am free to confess I was very close to despair.

I dreaded the lash as fully as any poor devil who was ever sentenced to it deservedly; and I found myself speculating, with a coward's fear, upon the gruesome ordeal.

I was still in this mood of self-torturing apprehension, trying vainly to get to sleep and shake off the horrors of it, when my cell door was opened and two warders entered. By the lantern which one carried I saw two other figures in the gloom beyond, and I jumped to the conclusion that the time for my knouting had been put forward.

"This is the prisoner." I recognized the governor's voice.

The warder's lantern flashed to my face, and out of the gloom came a sonorous "Good Lord!" Then some one rushed forward and took my hands. "My dear boy, what in the name of heaven and earth does all this mean?"

It was my old friend, General von Eckerstein; and as I felt the grasp of his hands I closed my eyes with a deep, deep sigh of intense thankfulness.

"There has been a bad mistake, that's all," I said, scarcely knowing what I said or did for the moment. The sense of relief was so intense as to be almost overpowering. I found myself laughing fatuously.

"This is your friend, general?" asked the governor.

"Why, of course it is! It's the most extraordinary thing in the world. Why on earth didn't you send for me before?"

"I tried to, but—I had better explain everything."

"He has proved himself a very dangerous and desperate man, general," said the governor. "Will you answer for him?"

"Answer for him? Yes; with my life, man. Can you let me see him privately? I'm lost in amazement."

"Take off his irons," ordered the governor.

"Fettered, too! Heavens! what would your father have said?"

The irons were taken off, and I was allowed to go with the general to one of the governor's rooms, where we were left alone. This gave me time to regain my self-control.

"Now perhaps you'll tell me all about it," said my friend.

"Two things first. Give me a cigar, and tell me how you have come from Petersburg just in the nick of time."

"From Petersburg? I have not come from Petersburg; I am in Warsaw for a time. But what do you mean? You knew that when you sent me this."

He handed me a letter as follows:

DEAR OLD FRIEND: Come to me at once to the Kreuzstadt fortress. I am a prisoner. For God's sake, come!

ROBERT ANSTRUTHER.

I cannot write this myself, but do not fail me.

His shrewd eyes were fixed upon me

as I looked up. "Umph! Who's the woman?" he asked.

I hesitated and smiled as I laid the letter down, and, to fill the pause, lighted my cigar.

"Don't," he jerked.

I started; for the warning came so pat on my thoughts of the best tale to make.

I looked across and met his keen, penetrating gaze.

"Young Bob Anstruther, if you try and lie to me I'll throw up the whole thing. Trust me with the truth, and I'll do for you what your father's friend should."

"The secret is not mine and——"

"Devil take the boy!" he burst in vehemently. "Don't I love John Anstruther's son like my own child, or do you think an old diplomat gabs and blabs like a washer-woman? Confound you! do you want to make me give you my word of honor, you young idiot?"

TO BE CONTINUED.



ON JOHN BULL'S PAY-ROLL

THE British House of Commons is the happy hunting-ground for well-paid officials who do next to nothing for their living, and need assistance even to pretend to be doing something.

Thus the most exhausting work of the sergeant of the House of Commons appears to be sitting in a kind of church pew all day. For this he gets six thousand dollars a year, and when he gets tired his deputy, for a miserable four thousand a year, goes to his relief without a moment's hesitation. The deputy also, however, gets tired at times, so he has an assistant at twenty-five hundred a year.

The sergeant and the deputy, by the way, are supplied with a beautiful furnished house each, with coal and light free, and the assistant gets a house allowance of seven hundred and fifty dollars a year.

Black Rod, who is a distinguished gentleman in the House of Lords, also receives a substantial income of five thousand dollars per annum for "summoning the faithful Commons" to the Upper House on certain occasions, a duty which an ordinary messenger boy would do just as well, and more gladly, for the British equivalent of our nimble dime.

A member of Parliament declared recently that in twenty-four years' time the country has paid in pensions and salaries, for ornamental offices alone, to five hundred and thirty-two aristocratic families and their dependents, a sum of five hundred and forty million dollars.

A Chinese Romeo

By Charles Kroth Moser

Author of "In Chinatown," "At the Hour of the Rat," Etc.

We commend this study of the Chinaman in America to your serious consideration. Mr. Moser's pictures of life in Chinatown, San Francisco, have about them the same fascination that grips you when you visit a Chinese theater or are smuggled into an opium den by a friendly reporter



O YOW sat stolidly among the sea of yellow faces in the pit, and gazed without blinking at the moving figures on the stage. The great actor, Chen Hitsu, stormed the boards of the Washington Street theater, and Ho Yow came nightly to forget his grief in listening to the stirring squeals of the fiddles, the whang-clanging of tom-toms, and the ear-torturing wails of the players executing their lines. The execution was a harrowing thing!

But there was no surcease in all this for Ho Yow. His heart was very heavy. Occasionally he raised stony eyes upward to the woman's balcony, where a cream-colored face, fairer than the petals of the pond-lily, drooped over the railing and flashed down a shower of star-dust from its golden-gleaming eyes. But the star-dust was not for Ho Yow; time had been when the shower did fall on him, and his leathery skin had gone all rose-colored in its light. But now—when he looked a red tongue darted at him from between saucy lips; and dainty jeweled hands made gestures of derision. Then he dropped his gaze to the stage again, and stolidly watched the shifting scenes.

Ah, lily-fair Toy San! She came to the theater every night; and he came, too, to sit with the men in the pit and wonder why her love had changed.

He had wooed her so long—the old *nakoda*, or match-maker, had even seen her father; and all things had been arranged for their wedding. He had sent bracelets of jade, and hairpins of silver and porphyry to her august mother; he had given bangles of near-gold, and anklets of just-as-good-as-ivory to Toy San herself. And she had even sent him a machine-turned ring—like the foreign pigs use—in exchange. It was so!

At his expense her leather-lined father had imbibed many pitchers of Sam-shu and gin-drams in which there was only a very little water—for, of course, a man must have his profit, even if he is treating his father-in-law.

Yes, everything had been arranged; and now—Toy San mocked him and made signs with her pretty fingers that were not complimentary, and all his friends saw them, too. It had been so for three weeks, and Ho Yow was very sad.

There was a mystery somewhere, of course; the girl either had a devil or a lover! Which? Ho Yow fervently wished he knew. A devil one can cheat, a lover one can bribe—or sell his body to the hatchetmen. Ho Yow knew several ways of evening up scores with a lover; but a contemptuous woman nettles one like a cockle-bur under the saddle-girth of an ass.

This night it was the same as it had been for one-and-twenty past nights; whenever he looked up at the radiant maid he caught a smirk and a grimace

that sizzled his vanity down to the toes of his white sandals. He dared not look more than twice.

The play was the three hundred and eighty-sixth of the Five Hundred Sublime Feats of the Lord Buddha. Each feat has a one-night play, lasting for hours, all to itself; and Ho Yow, as a good Buddhist, ought to have been as deeply immersed in its intricacies as his fellows—who were packed into the dirty, bare auditorium like anchovies in a can of oil.

For the three hundred and eighty-sixth feat is indeed a marvel of accomplishment. Giants are vanquished, dragons are despatched, a fair maiden is brought out of the bowels of the mountains where she had been enchanted and hidden for a thousand years by titanic troglodytes. The engulfing seas are spanned and, amid the whoop and bang of tom-toms, the weird screaming of demoniacal fiddles and a hellish roar of infernal noises, Lord Buddha's two-edged lathe sword hews a path for himself and the rescued damsel through the thunders and the brazen heavens of a hideous host of hostile gods.

It is generally at this point that the irreverent tourist, sitting in a wooden chair on the stage at fifty cents per, remarks to the guide:

"Why doesn't he marry the girl?" And the sage leader of the sight-seeing squad rebukes his levity with: "That is not good pidgin."

But it is also at this point that the masklike heathen face sometimes displays an emotion, and an appreciative smile ripples over the yellow sea of faces in the pit. Here and there a lonely voice may pipe:

"*Ting haow!*" [Very good.]

But such wild enthusiasm sounds so much like a riot that the police are called in by the fat old burghers to quell the disturbance; only the young bloods dare smile at such deeds done to stir young blood.

Ho Yow sat through it all as grim as a row of false teeth in the jawbones of a skull. It mattered nothing to him that as the "action" of the drama

progressed a cock-eyed coolie came on and placed a battered chair in the center of the stage to represent a mountain. The coolie did not say: "Let this be a mountain!" He was not an actor; only the property-man. The audience had to imagine it was a mountain, or anything else but a chair.

Neither did it matter to Ho Yow that in the next scene the selfsame chair in the selfsame place became the rolling, tumultuous sea; that, too, being left to the imagination. (The Chinese are unexcelled in stretching it to any limits.) Nor was it of any interest to him that still later that invaluable property-chair took all the brunt of Lord Buddha's furious sword-whacks in its further rôle of brazen haven of the inhospitable gods. It was a versatile chair, and could play any number of parts.

Ho Yow saw these things, but his heart was not touched. Ho Yow was in love—and as every one knows, when a man is in love nothing matters. His thoughts were all of Toy San, and the wonder of it that she should pass him up—*him*, the keeper of a fish-market in Chan Pow Alley, the half-owner of a nice little hovel in Buck Gong Place where one could get deliriously happy on rice-water and gin—yes, and the pious teacher of a Sunday-school class at the white pigs' mission, too! There was something strange in this unmaidenly conduct of Toy San!

While he was pondering on these things the enchanted lady of the drama came on the stage; she was pursued by a half-naked brown man wearing a dragon's shield and a paper sword. That was about all he wore. The brown man was the dragon; dragons can carry swords, chant curses, tell stories, and play the dickens after a very human fashion in Chinese plays. And the lady was a man; it is paradoxical but it's true. In all Chinese dramas the parts of women are taken by men who make a sad mess of the female character as it is viewed by Western eyes. But a woman must never be seen on the stage; it is indecent.

Tsu Ming, the foremost female impersonator among all the Thespians of the Flowery Kingdom, was the leading lady; he minced, simpered, curveted, and capered about the boards in the most approved ladylike manner. And during the rescue scene he emitted real screams. Meantime, the tortured fiddles anxiously searched their souls for sounds to tell their agony.

Tsu Ming was small, pink, and prettily made; added to nature were a few lines of paint, a hair ornament or two, the satin breeches (horrors!) and fan of a maiden—and only a lover could have said that he was not the real thing. He tripped over to the legs of the chair-mountain, under which he was supposed to be hidden, and began to caterwaul in the high falsetto voice of a feline in distress. After the first few wails he glanced up to the woman's balcony and immediately the caterwaul dropped to a purr.

The heart of Ho Yow turned topside down in his breast. Following the upward glance of the actor, he saw Toy San's golden-gleaming eyes scattering the star-dust all over the reincarnated tom-cat. She was smiling, and the lacquer fan held over her mouth by two slim fingers said things full of meaning to a jealous adorer. Ho Yow waxed furious under his placid countenance.

"Tsu Ming *poo haouw*," he said, so that everybody could hear. The which, being freely rendered into the vernacular of Broadway, tersely asserted that Tsu Ming was a "ham."

"Tsu Ming *ting haouw chee pong!*" declared his neighbors for three rows back, equally emphatic in their opinion that the impersonator was "all the goods."

Ho Yow merely grunted. So this was the *thing* she would take into her arms when she had thrown him over her shoulder. This pariah!—for wherever the children of the Flowery Kingdom dwell in the earth the actor is a being despised, as the lowest of the low. The very scullery maids in the cookshops preen themselves in his presence and give thanks to the sacred

goddess Kum Tah Foo Yam that they are not of such as he. For this base-born mimic of women, this filthy vermin that lived underground like a rat in a hole, Toy San, the beautiful, had mocked and spurned him. How could he "save his face," before his friends!—for, as every one knows, if a man have not "face" he may as well die. Ho Yow's soul revolted at the thought of this shame put upon him.

Yes, he would have revenge! He would tear Tsu Ming's heart—but, paugh! Will a man soil his hands with the carcass of a toad?

During the rest of the play, Tsu Ming and the flower-faced maid smiled love at each other. Her saucy lips, like two cherries reddening in the sun, hissed a torrent of praises at the actor every time he spoke his little piece. Ho Yow finally saw her fan wave a promise of meeting; he had not seen Tsu Ming's fan wave its request, but the answer was enough. The Chinese have the coquette's language of fans and flowers and handkerchiefs down to a science. His face, as insoluble as alum in water, gave no sign of the blood boiling under his skin.

With a final crashing of gongs, a shrill triumphant yelp from the ki-yi on the throne, and a bursting fanfare of celestial inharmonies, Guy Pong, the dead dragon, came back to life on the field of carnage, simpered to the audience, and filed off the stage behind the victorious party of the Lord Buddha.

The play was over. The grimy hall suddenly echoed with the sing-song comment of hundreds of voices, and the audience sauntered like a flock of sheep, aimlessly, out the door.

Ho Yow sat perched nonchalantly on the back of his chair, his feet resting on the seat, until the last Eastern tourist had left the mourners' bench on the stage. (It is called the mourners' bench because the visitors ever sit there lamenting their fifty cents' initiation fee.) Then he sprang behind the scenes and went in search of Tsu Ming.

The actor-folk always live beneath the theater. Deep underground, in

tiny holes opening into tortuous burrowed passages where joss-sticks and punks are kept burning before hideous little images at every turn, the players live, cook, eat, sleep, and dream their lives away, like swarms of rats.

Bake-ovens throw fiery eyes out of the darkness; the air is choked with the smell of opium and cooking victuals. Tapers bathe carved crooked-backed gods, set in the walls, with a sickly greenish light, and give out an overpowering odor of rancid grease. The air is routed by a swarm of noxious vapors; spiders' webs, cockroaches' nests, and black bats hang about everywhere.

In one of the most squalid of the little dens, far below the pavement, Ho Yow found the leading lady. Tsu Ming had thrown off the garments of his rôle, and, clad only in a shirt and loose pantaloons, he was already coiled up in his bunk—the opium-pipe guttering at his lips. Ho Yow suddenly squatted before the little stone god in the corner, and, with one breath, puffed out all the lights that flared around it—that the red devils might come to plague the actor. It was an unmistakable announcement of hostility well intended to set quaking the heart of the rabbit, or the actor.

Tsu Ming calmly dropped his pipe, arose, and relighted the joss-sticks.

"Why come to me with curses and bring the black hand of pestilence, honorable one?" he asked mildly, as he stretched himself again on the blanket.

"Because thou art a dog who darest to lick the hand of one whose feet would become leprous at the touch of thy lips, scullion," answered Ho Yow.

"Ah, 'tis thou, then!" Tsu Ming smiled lazily, as he puffed out a roll of white smoke. "I have heard of thee, perhaps. Yes, 'tis true; I lick her hand while thou liest in the dust at her feet and she steps over thy carcass."

The temper of a fiend nearly strangled Ho Yow as he sprang to his feet. His yellow, misshapen teeth grinned out of his blue, drawn lips with the malignancy of a hyena's fangs. He

whipped a long fish-knife from under his blouse and flung it his arm's length in the air over the body on the bunk.

Tsu Ming laughed lightly, tauntingly, without moving a limb. "It is easy for the heel of a man to crush a worm," he drawled.

Ho Yow's uplifted hand dropped to his side, and the knife fell on the floor. He—the unemotional Chinese—slipped to the bunk and hid his face in the blankets, sobbing like a child with impotent rage.

"Thou knowest, thou low viper, that I cannot strike thee and keep my face. Oh, if thou wert but the son of a woman instead of a swine I would pluck out thy heart." He continued to weep.

"Yes, I am like a woman, Ho Yow," the actor droned complacently. "Why should I deny it or be ashamed? I protect my hide with my weakness; it is well, and easy. I am not afraid."

Ho Yow arose. "Dog of slaves, how many yen's worth dost thou care for Toy San? Thy love is not worth the despised penny of the white pigs, but I will give thee a price that will keep thy precious hide stuffed with yenshee for many nights. How much, dog, how much?"

"How much will thou give, corrupter of the virtuous?"

"I will give thee an hundred yen."

Tsu Ming shook his head.

"I will give thee three hundred yen."

Tsu Ming laughed.

"By the sacred carvings on my grandsire's tomb, I will give all my goods to the carrion claws of the money-lenders and feed thee, thou ravenous cur, the full six hundred of the white pigs' yen."

Tsu Ming twisted the black opium pill in the blue flame of the tiny cooking-lamp. He rolled it deftly over the smooth bowl of his pipe before he answered:

"It is enough, Ho Yow. But I will not forfeit the golden-lily feet of Toy San to thee for six thousand times six hundred yen. Thou hast said that I am base-born, and so let it be as truth.

But Toy San shall be the mother of my sons, and they shall be exalted. And they shall twist the queues of the fishmonger's spawn and laugh. I have said it, Ho Yow. Her beauty is as the pearls of Fatima which are beyond price, and I shall languish in her smiles and bathe in the fountains of her tears when thou art sore from the tongue-pricks of scolds. Get thee a fishwife or a stewmaker from the sculleries of the high-born, if thou wouldst have sons. Even such are better than thou."

Ho Yow started toward the door. The purpose in his heart was not deeper than the gravity in his face. Tsu Ming was exultant.

"If thou wouldst gaze upon the happiness of thy star-eyed goddess again," he sneered, "come to the feast of Hong Li Foo to-morrow night in the Retreat of the Delicious Duck. Thou wilt see her sipping her tea from my cup and——"

Ho Yow closed the door. Dark thoughts and grim determination cast a hood over his ears. Ho Yow's love was of the strong man who dares.

An hour later he stood before the high priest of the *feng-shin* [earth devils]. In his hands he carried a red pheasant-cock, a pair of ducks, and a hamper filled with sturgeon. He prostrated himself before the priest and knocked his head against the floor.

"Thou art wise, O Hai Ting!" he cried, "and hast the knowledge of the gods and many generations of illustrious ancestors under thy cap. Tell me, O prophet of the world below the sea! how shall I gain the desire of my heart?"

The priest listened attentively as Ho Yow told his story. The ducks, the fish, and the pheasant-cock were sweet meat for the *feng-shin*, who never eat themselves, but bestow the offerings of the faithful upon the priests.

"I would have her, O sacred one!" cried Ho Yow, "for she is bone of my bone and her soul is as the soul of my mother—to whom may the gods grant a thousand years, for she hath borne me!"

The priest smiled indulgently; he

had been the last resort of lovers before.

"Dost thou love the maid, or is it her beauty thou cravest?" he asked.

Ho Yow turned the question over in his mind. He pondered long and slowly. He had been without sons for many years.

"It is the maid," he said at last.

"Then, my son, strip thou her beauty from her even as the lotus is stripped of her petals when the frost comes, and who else, save thou, then will have her for wife?" suggested the wise man of the *feng-shin*. "It is in thy hands; I can tell thee no more."

Ho Yow went back to his forlorn roost behind the fishmonger's stall. He worried over the old priest's words till the morning sun called to him in the voice of the new-born East.

If he should wreck her beauty, Tsu Ming and the young men would fall away from her slashed face like red leaves from the oak-tree in November. Yes, but if her relatives should stalk him with the terrible *po tautsi*—the gun-slayers of the highbinders! Ah, no, that could not be; for who else would marry the girl? And an unmarried girl is a shameful disgrace to one's family; all the tears of the goddess Kwan Yin cannot wipe it out. Ho Yow made up his mind.

At noon that day a drug servant of the white pigs sold a worn-looking Chinese, whose clothes smelled to heaven with fish stains, a vial of vitriol.

That night Toy San, her duenna, and the slave women of her father, left the theater for the Retreat of the Delicious Duck. Where Dupont Street, glittering with its thousand Oriental lights, crosses the dark breadth of Clay Street, the women turned the corner toward their rendezvous with the actor-lady.

Toy San was laughing; laughing as women laugh when they are heartless and indifferent; laughing as in their sleeves at the lovers of whom they have tired—and almost forgotten. The gaiety of the catbird flaunted its mocking voice from between her saucy lips.

Ho Yow stepped suddenly out of the shadows; she saw him, and smiled the red, full smile of scorn. Her lips parted derisively; they were as fair a mark as ever stood for the branding.

He lifted his arm; a shower of fiery drops, a splash like the drip of the nightdew on a rose-leaf, a shriek that only agony utters—and the score was even between the man and the woman. She screamed, and Ho Yow laughed as he fled away into the darkness.

A week later Ho Yow stood behind his chopping-block cutting off slices of fish for one of the high-born of Jackson Street. The gray-haired *nakoda* with straggling beard and toothless gums, entered the shop. He drew the fishmonger aside.

"Once thou didst love the golden lily, Toy San," he said. "What wouldst thou pay me if I told thee that every day she is pining her heart out for thee, even as the caged bird mourns for its forest home?"

Ho Yow threw up his hands mockingly. "Oh," he said indifferently, "not a donkey in the stables of the rag-pickers but knows that she is a rose whose petals have been seared by the frost. Her ugliness is the mock of the young men; the red scars on her mouth the pity of the old women. Wouldst

thou harness me with her shame and her ugliness?"

"Thou shouldst know whence came her shame, and from whom."

"By the sacred fire on the altar of my ancestors," declared Ho Yow fervently, "I know nothing of it! But—her father is rich. What sayeth he?"

"Eight hundred yen and the house in Cum Cook Alley," answered the *nakoda*, purring softly. Ho Yow pondered a long five minutes. At last he said, seeing the match-maker offered no more:

"My heart is soft with pity, even as the cooing of the dove hath sad music. I will take the blemished Toy San, and the eight hundred yen and the house in Cum Cook Alley because my heart is tender and the maiden is sorrowful. Take thou this bronze urn to the weeping Toy San and bid her be comforted; bring me the fresh emblem of her love. And see thou—for the yen thou dost earn—that the betrothal is made known. Thus we shall be married."

The *nakoda* went out with the betrothal urn for Toy San under his blouse; he was immensely pleased with his victory. He did not see the great hamper of meats that Ho Yow sent joyously to the wily high priest of the *feng-shin*.



UNAPPRECIATED

A NOTED evangelist was preaching a few Sundays ago in a church in Philadelphia. The family who entertained him had a little daughter who was usually very fond of attending service. When the family were ready little Elsie flatly refused to go with them.

"I don't want to go to church," she declared.

"What's the matter?" asked the mother, much surprised, "are you ill?"

"No, but I heard Doctor — before, and I don't like him," confessed the child.

"Oh, Elsie, that's a wicked thing to say!" gasped the mother. "Tell mother why."

"Well," said Elsie confidentially, "he preaches so long that I can't keep awake, and he preaches so loud that I can't go to sleep."

As the evangelist tells the story on himself, it's probably true.

The Adventures of Felix Boyd

By Scott Campbell

Author of "Below the Dead Line," Etc.

XI.—THE HOUSE OF SILENCE

(A Complete Story)



“Is it possible that you mean, Doctor Vantoon, that the missing girl is deaf and dumb?” Felix Boyd’s brows were elevated in surprise.

“Yes, that is precisely

ly what I mean.”

“She is one of your patients?”

“She is.”

“Deaf and dumb—is it possible? This adds to the gravity of the matter.”

“I now am sure, Mr. Boyd, that you fully appreciate the extreme urgency of the case, as well as the many reasons for my anxiety. My reputation and that of my house are seriously threatened. The welfare of this sadly afflicted girl, if not her life and honor, may also be at stake, which is a far more serious matter. I am completely unnerved by the terrible occurrence. I am so affected by her disappearance and by the alarming possibilities which——”

Felix Boyd checked him with a gesture, not a little moved by the agitation of the venerable specialist. There is always something irresistibly pathetic in the grief and distress of old age; and the aspect of Doctor Dudley Vantoon, while stating the occasion for his appeal to Felix Boyd that autumn morning, was extremely pitiable. His exceeding paleness, his choked voice and tearful eyes, the nervous trembling

of his gray head and slender white hands—even Coleman, the Central Office man, despite his habitual grim apathy, was affected by these signs of the famous physician’s distress.

“Unless you calm yourself, doctor, we may waste valuable time,” Boyd now protested with considerate gentleness. “If I am to look into this matter for you with any hope of success, you must state the circumstances as briefly and correctly as possible. Who is this missing patient, and when was her absence discovered?”

The protest was not without effect upon Doctor Vantoon, in the library of whose suburban establishment the three men were seated—Boyd and Jimmie Coleman having arrived only a few minutes before. From the windows one could see the Hudson, glistening in the sunlight of the October morning, and the trees of a surrounding park, and the beautiful grounds of a large estate situated on the bank of the river, a hundred yards distant.

There are many who will recall, some with profound gratitude for the services done them by the eminent specialist, Doctor Vantoon’s private home for the treatment of the deaf and dumb. His world-wide fame, his remarkable professional achievements, his enviable distinction as a man of many humanitarian impulses, and the reputation of his splendid establishment—all seem to require hardly cursory mention even. That something most extraordinary had

occurred to affect him so seriously was only too obvious.

"You are right, Mr. Boyd, and I will govern my feelings," he now hastened to reply. "The name of the missing girl is Honora Klein, and her absence was discovered about seven o'clock this morning."

"Well, well, it now is only ten, so not much time has been lost," said Boyd encouragingly. "I hastened up here immediately after receiving your telephone-call. First, tell me something about the girl. Who is Miss Klein, and how long has she been a patient here?"

"She is an only child of the late Jacob Klein, a wealthy New York brewer, who died about four years ago. The girl has been deaf and dumb since her birth, yet of late—I may say it with pardonable pride, Mr. Boyd, I am sure—of late I have seen indications that the sense of hearing and the power of speech may, under my methods of treatment, ultimately be acquired by her."

"I have heard of your marvelous achievements in that line, Doctor Vantoon," bowed Felix Boyd. "I would suggest, however, that you stick close to the point. How old is Miss Klein, and how long has she been here?"

"She is nearly twenty, and has been here about two years," Doctor Vantoon quickly answered. "Her father left her a fortune of nearly two hundred thousand dollars, which is held in trust for her until her twentieth birthday by the law firm of Abel Matfield & Son, the elder Matfield having been an intimate friend and the legal adviser of the girl's father. She is——"

"One moment," interrupted Boyd. "Are both of her parents dead?"

"Yes. Both of them came from Germany many years ago, and Honora is without relatives in this country."

"Do you know her exact age?"

"She will be twenty in about two months, I believe."

"And has been a patient here for about two years?"

"Nearly that. She lived with the Matfields for about two years after her

father's death, Abel Matfield becoming her guardian and adviser, and it was at his suggestion that she came here for treatment. Naturally, Mr. Boyd, he takes a fatherly interest in the afflicted girl, and has watched over her with exceeding care. I dread meeting him after what has occurred, yet I already have notified him by telephone of the deplorable facts. I expect him to arrive here at any moment. He has repeatedly urged me to keep a watchful eye on his ward."

"Was there any special reason for watching Miss Klein?" Boyd asked.

"Her guardian appeared to think so, yet I am convinced, on the other hand, that the girl is possessed of an exemplary character. She is very pretty, and has a most gentle and lovable nature. It is not easy to think that one so grievously afflicted as Miss Klein can have any very vicious inclinations."

"Assuredly not," declared Boyd. "Do you know why her guardian thinks so, and urged you to watch her so carefully?"

"Yes, yes, he explained that," Vantoon nervously rejoined. "It appears that the girl is in love with a young lawyer; a man who, despite her infirmities, is said to have a very profound affection for her. Their friendly relations date back to the time her father was living, and I am told that he did not oppose them. Matfield does, however, in view of the girl's afflictions; and there has been some little estrangement between them because of it. Yet Matfield has visited her each week, and appears very sincere in the advice he gives her."

"Quite naturally," nodded Boyd. "Who is the young lawyer?"

"His name is Thomas Lovejoy. His home is in Yonkers, a few miles below on the east side of the river. So far as I have been able to learn, he is a man of excellent character and much ability."

"Have you ever met him, Doctor Vantoon?"

A tinge of color rose over the physician's pale face, yet he quickly bowed his gray head and answered:

"Yes, frequently, Mr. Boyd. I will confess that my fondness for Miss Klein has led me to be perhaps unwarrantably indiscreet."

"How so, doctor?"

"I have, despite her guardian's instructions, allowed Miss Klein to receive occasional visits from Lovejoy."

"Ah, I see!"

"Knowing that the girl would soon arrive at the age when Matfield's guardianship would expire, and feeling sure that the love of the young couple was honorable and sincere, my sympathy for Miss Klein has led me to disregard her guardian's commands. To me it seemed most cruel to oppose the love of one into whose life so little of the romantic could be expected to enter. For the house of my patients is, as you easily can imagine, Mr. Boyd, a house of silence—a silence like that of a tomb; never a sound heard; never a word spoken! Who, indeed, would have the heart to bar the hope of heaven from a girl so sadly afflicted; the heaven which comes of an honorable love? Yet I now am forced to believe that this unfortunate girl has been outrageously misled by Lovejoy, and that he has been knave enough to abduct her. If that is true, Mr. Boyd, and——"

"Is there any further evidence of it?" Boyd abruptly demanded, drawing forward his chair. "Let's get at the bare circumstances surrounding Miss Klein's departure. When was she last seen here, Doctor Vantoon?"

His curtness, his attitude of intense interest, the sharper gleam in the depths of his frowning eyes—all indicated that he was somewhat moved by the pathetic remarks of the physician. The Central Office man, who had been listening in grim silence, smiled as he noted the change, the significance of which he readily appreciated.

Doctor Vantoon hastened to state the circumstances.

"Miss Klein is known to have been in her room at ten o'clock last evening," said he. "She is one of nine patients who have rooms on the second floor of the east wing of the house.

That entire wing is under the care and supervision of a female attendant, Miss Jane Randall, who has been in my service for several years, and whose private room adjoins Miss Klein's. From Miss Randall's room there is a stairway leading down to a door at the extreme end of the east wing, by which way Miss Klein evidently departed."

"I infer, then, that it was necessary to pass through the attendant's room in order to reach the stairway mentioned."

"Yes, Mr. Boyd."

"And Jane Randall is the only attendant in the east wing?"

"Yes. There is electric communication between her room and mine, however, in case of need."

"Where is your room located, Doctor Vantoon?"

"In the main part of the house, directly over my front office. The east wing was added several years ago, and is occupied only by female patients."

"Nine in all, I think you said?"

"Yes."

"Are all of them deaf and dumb?"

"They are, Mr. Boyd."

"Then Jane Randall is the only person in that wing who could have heard Miss Klein's movements," remarked Boyd, with an odd glance at the Central Office man. "A house of silence, indeed, Jimmie. Only deaf ears in that east wing—barring two! Only dumb lips, Jimmie, from which no cry of alarm could have issued. Yes, yes, a house of silence, indeed. The conditions certainly were most favorable for the girl's departure, and for the co-operation of her confederate, assuming that Doctor Vantoon's suspicions are correct."

"I should say so, Felix," growled Coleman, with a grim nod of assent. "They couldn't have been much better."

"By the way," added Boyd, reverting quickly to the aged physician, "could Miss Klein easily have left the house by any of the doors ordinarily used?"

"No, far from it," Vantoon hastened to explain. "To have done so, Mr. Boyd, she would have had to come

down the stairs from the east wing and then pass through the main hall of the house. That is always lighted at night, with an attendant in charge at all hours, and the girl could not possibly have evaded detection."

"As a matter of fact, then, the rear stairway available from Miss Randall's room was the only way left her?"

"That is right, Mr. Boyd, and we know that she went that way."

"How so, doctor?"

"Because the rear door was found unlocked this morning, despite that it is very seldom used. In a foot-path leading toward the river, moreover, are the prints of shoes corresponding in size and style with those worn by Miss Klein; also other impressions which obviously were left by a man, presumably her companion. We know that they must have been made late last night, Mr. Boyd, for there was a heavy shower in the early evening, which would have obliterated them if they then had existed."

"Are they still discernible?"

"I think so."

"Let's go out and have a look at them," said Boyd, abruptly rising. "Come with us, Jimmie. They may suggest something worthy of note, and very possibly reveal the course taken by the culprits. A culpable act, indeed, this abduction of a deaf and dumb girl. Lead the way, doctor. I'm rather surprised that the movements of Miss Klein were not heard by Jane Randall, when she was in the latter's room. Persons having the care of others are light sleepers and quick to hear the slightest sound in the night."

"That is very true, Mr. Boyd, and ordinarily Jane is no exception," Vantoon replied, as he led the way through the hall. "Last night, however, she did something very unusual. Feeling strangely drowsy about ten o'clock, she lay down on her couch for a few moments, intending to disrobe for bed a little later. She fell asleep almost immediately, however, and was found there at seven o'clock this morning by one of the chambermaids whose duties took her to that wing of the house, and

who noticed that the lamp in the attendant's room had not been extinguished."

"Had Miss Randall been lying on the couch all night?"

"Yes. She still was dressed, and appeared to be in a deep stupor, from which she was aroused only with some difficulty. She cannot account for the strange experience, the like of which never occurred before, and she now feels her position very keenly."

"She is entirely trustworthy, I infer."

"I have not the slightest doubt of that," Vantoon gravely rejoined. "She has been in my employ nearly five years, and I have never known her to neglect her duties. She has been faithful in every respect."

"Then it rather looks to me as if—but I'll get at that later," Boyd abruptly broke off to add, as the three men rounded a corner of the main house and proceeded toward the east wing.

He appeared perplexed by these disclosures, if one were to judge by his frowning eyes, yet he checked a remark that Coleman was about to make, and then gave his entire attention to a view of the surroundings and the evidence mentioned by Doctor Vantoon.

The east wing was only a two-story, wooden structure built out from the main part of the house, and Boyd halted only briefly at an open door in the extreme end of it, merely glancing into the narrow lower entry and up the stairs leading to the room which adjoined Miss Randall's.

Then, with head bowed and hands in his pockets, he fell to studying the foot-path mentioned, following it straight away from the door and across a strip of lawn, then off to the rear of a stable some fifty yards from the house, at which point it diverged abruptly toward the river, passing near a vine-covered, rustic summer-house half-hidden amid clumps of shrubbery and tall lilac-bushes; and finally ending at a small stone landing at the bank of the stream.

Boyd paused only twice to inspect the path more closely, once at a point where a patch of yellow clay appeared

amid the surrounding grass, and in which the faint footprints at intervals discernible were a little more sharply outlined.

"Doctor Vantoon is right, Jimmie," he remarked, glancing up while he knelt to examine them. "The girl came this way, there's no doubt of that. Note this impression left by a French heel and a narrow sole. Miss Klein wore a fashionable shoe, Jimmie. Here is one left by a much broader heel, moreover, evidently that of her companion, as the doctor has inferred. Well, well, and here is—humph! there's no doubt of it. They certainly came this way."

Vantoon responded only with a nod, while Coleman made no reply at all. Neither noticed the sudden flash in Boyd's eyes. The opinion he had expressed was not in the least surprising, it being that at which Doctor Vantoon had arrived; yet both were a bit puzzled by a move which Felix Boyd made before he arose from his crouching attitude on the greensward.

He passed his hand lightly over the grass near-by, then glanced at his palm. It was slightly soiled with particles of the yellow clay, with which the shower of the previous evening had besprinkled the surrounding grass. Before Coleman could ask the question that rose to his lips, however, Boyd quickly inquired, yet with seeming indifference:

"Do you employ any stable-hands, doctor?"

"Yes, one," replied Vantoon, wondering.

"What is his name?"

"James Grady."

"Does he sleep in the stable?" asked Boyd, as he continued to follow the path toward the river.

"Yes. He has a room in the loft."

"Have you asked him whether he saw or heard anybody out here last night?"

"I have, Mr. Boyd, and he heard nothing unusual."

"Do you keep a dog?"

"No."

"Nor a boat?" queried Boyd, halting near the landing mentioned, which

consisted of only a few large rocks laid out from the low edge of the bank.

"No, I have no boat," replied Vantoon, shaking his head. "My patients have the run of the grounds, which cover nearly three acres, but I oppose their venturing on the river. No boats ever land here, Mr. Boyd, that I am aware of."

Despite this assertion, the eyes of Felix Boyd lingered briefly on a small black spot on the side of one of the rocks, then on a slight, angular indentation in the overhanging sod along the edge of the bank, either of which might have been left by a small black skiff, and at no very remote time.

Boyd made no remark about them, however. He stood gazing across the sunlit river for several minutes, then at the trees and shrubbery which grew more thickly in this locality, and finally at the distant house and the long east wing, partly hidden by the rise of the intervening land.

"Let's return," he presently said, quite abruptly. "I want a few words with your attendant, Jane Randall, before I express my opinion of this most unfortunate—ah! if I am not mistaken, doctor, your friend Matfield and his son have arrived from the city. Two gentlemen are hurrying this way. By the looks of the elder, he is quite as deeply exercised as you anticipated, doctor."

II.

Followed by his companions, Felix Boyd had mounted to the higher ground somewhat back from the river while he was speaking, where he halted upon seeing the two strangers approaching through the park. A furtive glance at Doctor Vantoon's pale face was a very significant voucher to their identity.

The elder of the two was a tall, angular man of sixty years, with a gaunt, yellowish face, a pair of fiery gray eyes under shaggy eyebrows, and a nose hooked like the beak of a vulture. In his hand he carried a heavy cane, which he already was shaking with vicious asperity; while at his side strode a

broad-shouldered, flashily dressed fellow of thirty, with a type of countenance plainly revealing their relationship. Judging from their looks, they were a pair few men would have cared to oppose single-handed.

"Yes, yes, it's Matfield!" Doctor Vantoon faintly gasped, instinctively drawing nearer to Boyd. "I knew that he'd be very angry. I fear that he may go so far as to——"

Before he could complete his apprehensive remarks, to which Boyd indifferently listened, the rasping voice of the elder Matfield interrupted him.

"What's this I am told—what's this, you negligent old donkey?" he frothed and snarled while still approaching. "My ward missing—abducted—lured away by that accursed, presumptuous Yonkers lawyer! Stolen from under your very nose! Didn't I warn you? Haven't I told you, you egregious old ass, that you might expect no less? I've a mind to break every bone in your skin, you white-headed, negligent old idiot!"

He appeared, in fact, about to execute his threat, for he had raised his heavy cane above the head of the shrinking physician.

Boyd's long arm suddenly was extended, however, and with a quick twist of his hand and wrist he whipped the cane out of Matfield's grasp and tossed it upon the ground.

"That will be about enough, my friend," he said quietly. "Cut it out, or I shall hand you something you may not fancy."

Matfield swung round with eyes ablaze and lips twitching.

"Why do you interfere?" he cried, with a snarl like that of a wolf. "Who are you that you——"

"My name is Boyd—Felix Boyd, sir. Possibly you've heard it before. You are Mr. Abel Matfield, I take it, and this your son, Mr. Jonas Matfield. Shake hands, both of you, with Detective Coleman of the Central Office. You'll not blame me, I'm sure, for opposing violence upon this old gentleman, despite that he has slipped a cog in losing hold of your unfortunate and

misguided young ward. The proper move now, my dear Matfield, is to get on the track of the couple without delay, and, if possible, arrest them. Don't you think I am right, sir?"

There was no resisting Felix Boyd at such a moment. His insinuating personal magnetism, his attitude of quiet determination, a certain subtle threat in his incisive yet half-bantering voice—these and the disclosure of his identity, with that of Detective Coleman, combined to take most of the bluster out of the elder Matfield.

"Yes, yes, cut it out, dad," cried young Jonas Matfield. "There's nothing in abusing this old man, though he's been a bit lax in obeying your instructions. That he is anxious to make amends appears in the fact that he already has two detectives on the case. You're quite right, Mr. Boyd, and I'm sure the governor will agree with you."

"I hope so, young man, I'm sure," smiled Boyd.

Abel Matfield, who had hastened to recover his cane, now took the only wise course left open for him.

"Well, well, no doubt you're right," he agreed, still growling churlishly and glaring from one to another. "Yet your negligence is inexcusable, Vantoon. I repeatedly warned you of this. I told you that that infernal young lawyer——"

"Who told you, Mr. Matfield, that we suspect Miss Klein to have been abducted by Lovejoy?" interrupted Boyd.

"I was told at the house," declared Abel Matfield, pointing with his cane. "I also was informed where I should find you."

"Ah, I see!"

"Who else, indeed, could have lured my ward away? There is no other reasonable explanation of the girl's conduct, nor any other person who would thus have misled her. She——"

"I think you are right in that, Mr. Matfield," Boyd again interrupted, with an assenting nod. "The sooner we finish our investigations, then, the better."

"What further investigations are necessary?" Matfield petulantly demanded.

"I wish to be absolutely sure that I am on the right track, sir, before I get after this recreant couple."

"Why do you delay for that? How can you doubt that you are on the right track, when every particle of evidence points to——"

"I don't doubt it," snapped Boyd, with an impatient gesture. "But I must have something more than particles of evidence. I must have positive evidence of it, Mr. Matfield; such evidence as I can use to advantage. I shall not be long in acquiring it, I think, and you may come with me, if you like. Haste makes waste, as you've probably heard, and I shall insist upon running this affair in my own way, or not at all."

"Well, well, that's right enough," growled Matfield. "Don't go into the air over it."

"Oh, shut up, dad!" broke in Jonas brutally. "Mr. Boyd is right; perfectly right."

"We'll return to the house, Doctor Vantoon," added Boyd. "As I said before, sir, I want a few words with Miss Randall. Will you come?"

Both lawyers accepted the invitation, and followed close at his heels, the elder grumbling and growling all the while, and anathematizing the distressed and humiliated physician.

Boyd paid very little attention to either of them, however; and the Central Office man, though he wondered at what the former was driving, maintained his habitual grim and discreet silence. At the wing door, Boyd turned back to the physician and said:

"Can we go up to Miss Klein's room by these stairs, Doctor Vantoon?"

"Yes, by passing through Jane's room."

"I'll ask you to lead the way, if you please," smiled Boyd. "After you, gentlemen! This is capital fall weather, Matfield, isn't it?"

"Much too good for such bad business," snarled Abel Matfield, as he stumped through the entry and up the narrow, uncarpeted stairs.

Mr. Felix Boyd was the last to en-

ter. He glanced sharply after the others, then bent quickly, and with his hand wiped from the wall base-board near the door a faint smirch of yellowish clay, which had been observed by him when he glanced into the entry some twenty minutes before. The action was seen by none of his companions, however, and he was close upon their heels when Doctor Vantoon led them through the upper entry and into the room occupied by Jane Randall, a square, neatly furnished apartment, obviously that of a woman of very good taste.

She entered from an adjoining room at the same moment, a graceful, well-formed woman of thirty, with dark hair and eyes, thin lips, and a somewhat sallow complexion. She bowed—nervously, Boyd thought—when she beheld Abel Matfield's frowning face; but Doctor Vantoon hastened to prevent any further outbreak from the latter by saying quickly:

"Here is the attendant, Mr. Boyd. She will answer any questions you may wish to ask. Are you feeling better, Miss Randall?"

The woman smiled faintly. "Somewhat better, doctor. My mind still is a little dazed—I really cannot account for it. If I was addicted to drugs or sleeping-potions, I might attribute to them my unusual——"

"Possibly you took something of the kind without knowing it, Miss Randall," suggested Boyd, interrupting her with a grave smile.

"Without knowing it, sir?"

Miss Randall's dark brows rose inquiringly, while Abel Matfield started slightly and stared.

"I've been told how you passed the night; also that Miss Klein's room adjoins your own," Boyd quickly added. "I presume that is the door between the rooms?"

"Yes, sir, it is."

"Did you eat or drink anything last night which Miss Klein gave you, or prepared for you? It is quite possible that she——"

"I hope you don't imply," snarled Abel Matfield, glaring fiercely at Boyd,

"that my ward would have drugged this woman."

"I should say not," supplemented his son. "That's absurd!"

"Not so absurd as you think," declared Boyd, with a derisive laugh. "Your ward, Mr. Matfield, is possessed of some little craft and cunning, despite her physical afflictions, or she could not have hoodwinked you and others so effectively. You have not answered my question, Miss Randall."

The curtness of the last brought quite a hurried response from the listening woman. She colored deeply, and replied:

"Why, yes, Mr. Boyd, I did. I ate some candy which Miss Klein brought into my room and offered me just before she retired."

"Aha! is that so?" cried Boyd. "Was that something unusual?"

"She nearly always came in to bid me good night, sir."

"I refer to the candy."

"Yes, yes, that was unusual, I'll admit," stammered Miss Randall. "I really did not wish for any, but she begged me to eat just one piece, so I complied, and——"

"Begged you, eh? Just one piece, eh?" Boyd sharply interrupted. "Well, that's most significant. Do you know when and where she got the candy?"

"It came to her by mail, sir, yesterday afternoon."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Certainly I am. The box still is in her room; also the wrapper in which it——"

"Let me see them! Let me see them at once—pardon my brusqueness! It's my way when I'm engaged in work of this kind. Let me see the—oh! so this is the stuff, eh?"

With an asperity bordering on rudeness, and with a mingling of satisfaction and triumph as if already he had fixed upon the missing girl some really heinous transgression, Boyd had brushed Jane Randall aside and strode into the adjoining room, where he was quickly joined by his several startled observers, and had seized from the dressing-table a fancy box of choco-

lates and bonbons, and the cover still lying near it.

"Blank, eh?" he cried, glancing at the cover. "It's a pity that we haven't the confectioner's name. You'd better hang onto this stuff, Jimmie. We'll learn later whether it contains any drug. Look after it, please."

"I reckon the drug's here, all right," said Coleman, gazing into the box.

"Yes, yes, no doubt of it, Jimmie. What did you say, Miss Randall, about the wrapper? Is it——"

"It is here in the waste-basket. I noticed it when about putting the room in order, and I——"

"Let me see it—let me see it," cried Boyd, with an impatience that gave others but few opportunities to speak. "It bears the Yonkers postmark, and is inscribed with a pen. Do you know this hand, Miss Randall? Or you, doctor? It may be that of—wait a bit! Here's Miss Klein's desk, and we may find something even better than your judgment—the hand of the man himself. One look would settle the matter. If we could find a letter from—yes, this should be the very one. Postmarked Yonkers—signed by Lovejoy—hand the same; why—why, Jimmie, there's nothing to it! See for yourself, Mr. Matfield, and then deny, if you will, that your ward was crafty!"

Talking all the while with a rapidity exceeded only by his swift, energetic movements, Boyd had darted to an open desk near the window, snatched a package of loose letters from one of the pigeonholes, run through them till he found one bearing the Yonkers postmark; and then, upon opening it and finding a missive signed by Thomas Lovejoy, he had clapped both the open letter and the wrapper upon the desk, while he called the attention of his hearers to the similarity between the two writings.

"Nothing to it—I should say not, Felix!" exclaimed Coleman, gazing over Boyd's shoulder. "They were written by the same hand, that's evident."

"I am compelled to admit the likeness," muttered Abel Matfield, in ac-

cents of much chagrin. "Yet I could not have believed this of Honora. Do you really think, Mr. Boyd, that——"

"I think," cried Boyd, starting to his feet, "that Lovejoy mailed your ward the candy, and that she knew it to be drugged, and pressed it upon the attendant, only with a design to insure her sleeping so soundly that her own movements would not be heard and her departure prevented."

"Sure thing!" cried Coleman.

"It certainly appears so," Doctor Vantoon sadly admitted.

"Well, well, what's to be done?" Matfield harshly demanded, impatiently banging the floor with his cane. "Are you going to stand here till doomsday and let that rascal escape with——"

"No, no, I'll presently get after him," Boyd hurriedly interrupted. "You, Jimmie, step down to the doctor's telephone, and see if you can get in communication with Lovejoy. That's still barely possible, you know. If not, Jimmie, I'll give you a line to the Yonkers chief of police, and start you after the couple. I've another short line to follow in this locality."

As Coleman hastened from the room, having learned by experience not to get in the way of any move that Felix Boyd might be making, Abel Matfield, stumping hurriedly after the Central Office man, cried: "Hold on, sir! I'll go with you! If you succeed in ringing up that scoundrel, I'll have a word with him—that I will! that I will!"

As if also impelled by this bare possibility, Jonas Matfield and the physician hastened after the two; and Felix Boyd suddenly found himself alone with Jane Randall—precisely as he had designed. He turned to the dark-eyed, watching woman, and said, smiling agreeably:

"That elder Matfield is a rancorous old chap, isn't he? This is bad business, however, and one can hardly blame him."

"Bad business?—yes, decidedly so," Miss Randall gravely agreed. "I could not have dreamed of such a deplorable affair."

"I presume there are other patients on this floor?" queried Boyd, glancing into the adjoining corridor.

"Oh, yes; several."

"I would like to ask them—but I forgot; they are deaf and dumb. I have no art of conversing with my fingers, as I presume you have. Would you mind asking for me, Miss Randall, whether they saw any person in the grounds last night? One of them may possibly have been looking from her window during the night."

The woman hesitated for the bare fraction of a second, with her dark eyes fixed upon his, then: "Certainly, Mr. Boyd, I will do so," she said.

"Thank you very much, Miss Randall. Meantime I will see if I can find any further clue here that might serve me."

As the woman withdrew, Boyd's countenance changed like a flash. His look of bland suavity vanished. With lips suddenly compressed, he darted silently into Jane Randall's room, where he hurriedly examined the lower edge of several gowns and skirts in the closet, then several pairs of shoes lying on the floor. He studied with hurried glances a pile of folded newspapers on a stand in one corner; and one of these—the top one—he presently thrust into his hip pocket, and then returned to Miss Klein's room.

There he drew out his note-book and wrote a few lines on one of the blank pages; and, having replaced the book, sauntered indifferently into the adjoining hall.

Jane Randall, with rapidly moving fingers, was conversing with a group of young women near one of the corridor windows. Upon seeing Boyd, she hastened to join him, saying quickly:

"They can give me no information, Mr. Boyd. None of them were out of bed after retiring last night."

"I hardly hoped for anything important," smiled Boyd. "Nevertheless, Miss Randall, I'm greatly obliged to you."

"Not in the least, I assure you."

"I now will go down and rejoin the others. I think I must start Detective

Coleman after this couple without further delay."

Boyd found Coleman and his companions in the physician's office, and saw at a glance that nothing had been accomplished.

"Can't raise him, eh?" he cried, as he entered.

"No, he has no phone," growled Coleman. "His office is in town, but I can get no answer from——"

"Well, well, it does not matter, Jimmie," Boyd curtly interrupted, drawing out his note-book and pretending to write a line, then tearing out the page. "Here's a word to the Yonkers chief. You'd better go over there at once and see what you can learn. You may join me here about noon, or telephone any important information."

"And you, Felix?"

"Oh, I want to make some further inquiries," Boyd hurriedly rejoined. "I'm led to think that Lovejoy may have taken the girl across the river, in which case I may be able to locate some boatman who saw them, and who may put me definitely on their track. Be that as it may, Jimmie, you start for Yonkers at once, and report as soon as possible. I shall be here again before noon. As for you, Mr. Matfield, you may await our return, or I will telephone you of any developments."

Coleman had already left the house, and could be seen hurrying down the long gravel driveway leading out of the extensive grounds.

For several moments Abel Matfield stared doubtfully at Boyd, then blustered vehemently:

"Telephone nobody! I'll wait here till you return. I must know what you learn and what you intend doing."

"Very good—very good!" exclaimed Boyd approvingly. "I shall not be absent longer than an hour or two. It then will be nearly noon, doctor, when a bite to eat will be in order, if you'll be so kind. So-long, gentlemen, till I see you again!"

III.

An hour after Felix Boyd's departure, Abel Matfield, having worried

Doctor Vantoon into a state approaching nervous distraction, set forth with his son to inspect the foot-path leading to the river, ostensibly with a view to measuring for themselves the evidence upon which Mr. Felix Boyd had based his opinion.

Strange to relate, the face of each now wore a complacent and self-satisfied expression, which did not vanish until, when well out of view from the house, and nearly down to the bank of the stream, the eyes of Jonas Matfield suddenly lighted upon a man who was paddling a miserable little wherry in close proximity to the scattered shrubbery skirting the bank, and who was acting for all the world like one bent upon some rascally mission.

His personal appearance, moreover, seemed to warrant such a suspicion. He was a dark-featured fellow, with a short, brown beard and a pair of sunken, black-ringed eyes that boded no good. His clothes smacked of the sea, but they were greasy and in sore need of repair. He saw the Matfields at the same moment that Jonas saw him, and at once ran the nose of his wherry to the bank, then calmly shipped his oars.

"Who the devil's that fellow, dad?"

Jonas muttered, instinctively halting.

"What fellow do you mean, Jonas? Humph! I'm blessed if I know!" said Abel Matfield, upon beholding him. "He looks like a boatman."

"He looks to me more like a crook," growled Jonas. "You don't suppose that infernal detective is right, do you?"

"Right in what, Jonas?"

"In thinking some one saw the girl abducted."

The elder Matfield changed color and uttered a half-smothered oath.

"No, it's not likely," he replied, nervously gripping his cane. "If that were so, Jonas—the devil! that hobo is landing!"

With his rounded shoulders hunched forward, and his woolen cap drawn over his brow, the boatman had sprung ashore and dropped the painter of his wherry over a tree-stump. After several sharp glances to right and left, he

startled his two observers by significantly jerking his thumb toward the rustic summer-house, which offered a capital shelter from probable observation, and by crying with a remarkably hoarse and wheezy voice, much as if his vocal pipes were filled with night mists and river fogs:

"Bear off a bit and slip under cover. I've a word for the ears of you two which you'd better harken to. Look lively, too, afore I'm spotted from the house. Get a move on, d'ye hear?"

He halted in the doorway of the rustic house, which was little more than a huge, vine-covered arbor, and impatiently signed for them to follow him.

"What did he have the impudence to say, Jonas?" demanded Abel Matfield, with affected haughtiness. "Did you understand him?"

"I reckon we'd better understand him, dad, for sure," Jonas pointedly retorted, with an ugly frown. "He's wise to something; you can go the limit on that."

As if the suggestion carried with it some alarming possibility, Abel Matfield gripped his cane more firmly, and quickly approached the arbor, into the deeper shadows of which the boatman had now retreated.

"What do you mean, sir?" Matfield demanded as he entered. "What are you doing here, you rascal, and why——"

"Stow it—stow it, old cock!" interrupted the boatman, who was crouching to peer cautiously between some vines he was parting with his begrimed hands. "Stow it, I say, or mebbe you'll wish you had."

"Wish I had, you infernal ruffian! Do you mean——"

"Just what I say." The interruption silenced the choleric old lawyer. "D'ye think I've been skulking around here all this morning fur nothing? Not much, boss, as you'll find out before long—so be it your ugly heads ain't as fur from level as the uglier game you're playing."

"Game we're playing!" frothed Abel Matfield, beginning to brandish his

cane. "Are you mad? Do you dare assert that we——"

"Are two sports who ain't on the level—sure I do!" the boatman interrupted again, and leered horribly. "Take a bit of advice, too, before it's too late, the which a river-rat about my cut of cloth can give you. Not all the ears around here are deaf, boss, and that noisy tongue of your'n may get you two grafters into trouble."

"The fellow's right, dad," cautioned Jonas, when his father appeared about to break forth again. "Let's hear what he's got to say. He'd not venture to speak thus without some reason."

This hurriedly given advice was not without effect upon Abel Matfield. He swallowed his wrath, and demanded, now with his rasping voice somewhat lowered:

"What do you mean, you thieving scoundrel? Why do you address us in this fashion?"

The boatman perched himself on the corner of a bench near which he had been standing, and dangled one of his dripping boots over the edge.

"Don't call a chap hard names, my noble lord!" he protested. "Mebbe you've not heard as how chickens come home to roost. I could have told that smooth guy I've noticed around here this morning—I could have spun him the yarn I've been keeping for the ears of you two lovely lobsters. I reckoned you'd shape a course out here, you two alone, so I hung around out of sight until you showed up."

"Whom do you mean by a smooth guy?" Jonas frowningly demanded.

"Him as you two met an hour back, along with the feller as runs the home fur the deafs and dumbs. I had 'em under my peepers when you two hove in sight, and easy enough I could have told 'em what came of the gal who——"

"Stop a moment!" commanded Abel Matfield, much more calmly than he yet had spoken. "Do you mean, my man, that you know what became of this girl? If you know that, you can serve us to some advantage."

The fellow shrugged his shoulders,

still swinging his dangling leg, and indulged in a smile of assurance.

"It's myself I'm looking to serve, boss, not you two easy marks," he coolly replied.

"Is that why you said nothing to the detectives you claim to have seen here?" demanded Matfield.

"Aye, that's why, mister."

"Yet they would have paid you for any reliable information concerning the missing girl."

"Mebbe so—yet mebbe not!" leered the boatman. "I had in mind two people as I knowed would give up a wad of bills to have me keep my mouth closed."

"Speak more plainly, sir! I've no patience with your insolence, nor your beating about the bush. What do you know about this girl's disappearance?"

"Know about it, eh?" echoed the fellow. "Only what my own peepers showed me last night."

"Go on!" from Abel Matfield.

"I saw, first of all, a little black craft at the landing out here—and that's what I've never seen before; leastwise, not in the dead of night. I thought, mebbe, some chaps was after cracking the deaf and dumb establishment here. So I made a landing to find out what was doing, hiding my wherry close to the bank and myself in here."

"And then?"

"I soon saw I was wrong. 'Twasn't long before I saw a woman that works here—her with black eyes and hair—along with two men and a gal, that they were taking down to their craft. The two men put off across the river along with the gal a bit later, but the woman went back to the crib and——"

"Hold your horses!" interrupted Jonas, now grown gray as ashes. "Did you see the men plainly? Would you know them if——"

"Know 'em, eh!" cut in the boatman, with a derisive laugh. "D'ye think I'm daffy, or gone——"

"I think you're a lying, insolent scoundrel!" Abel Matfield's tone was violent, and indicated how much he was roused. "You imply that we were the two men. Your assertions are libel-

ous. You shall be arrested, you lying rascal, and——"

"Oh, cut it out, you fool!" gasped the boatman, suddenly springing down from the bench to retreat from the uplifted cane of the enraged lawyer. "If that's the way you feel, I'll say no more. I'll give the yarn to that smooth guy, instead, and mebbe——"

"You'll do nothing of the kind," asserted Jonas, instantly grappling with the boatman when he appeared about to escape, and hurling him violently against the rustic wall near-by. "You'll stay right here. Keep your head, dad, for this won't do!" he hurriedly added, wheeling sharply about to seize his father's uplifted arm. "We may be overheard. This dog must be silenced at once, but not with violence. You should see that for yourself. See here, you fellow, we'll do what's right by you. We've got the girl, I'll admit that, and——"

"And that's the one and only admission I've aimed to evoke!"

The interruption now came quick as a flash from the lips of the man who had been briefly shrinking with apparent alarm from the blind violence of one of his observers, while he listened with eyes aglow to the hurried, half-frenzied expostulations and confession of the other. He sprang up while he spoke, passing his hand swiftly over his head and across his face—a movement which, sweeping away a portion of his disguise, revealed the strong face of Mr. Felix Boyd.

Jonas Matfield swore; and from his father came a half-smothered roar of mingled astonishment and vengeful rage. Instantly, as if under the same impulse of utter desperation, both scoundrels sprang upon Boyd, and, despite his attempt to evade them, bore him heavily to the ground.

At the same moment something that at first might have appeared to be only a shadow, darted by the hanging vines of the rustic arbor and quickly dashed through the arched doorway; and in another moment two blows in quick succession, dealt by the brawny arm of the Central Office man, sent the Mat-

fields sprawling upon the ground at either side of the whilom boatman.

"Easy, Jimmie! That'll answer!" gasped Boyd, as he scrambled to his feet, quite pale for a second. "I wasn't dead sure you were so handy. Your irons for the son, Jimmie. I'll look after the old man."

"Plain to me, Jimmie?" queried Mr. Felix Boyd, with his eyes raised from the signed confession he had been reading. "Well, yes, it was tolerably plain, old man, even before we wrung the whole truth from those two rascals yesterday and restored Miss Klein to her quarters with Doctor Vantoon. Before I had talked long with the latter, Jimmie, I began to suspect the true facts.

"It really was very simple, Jimmie; so very simple that an explanation seems hardly required. At the very outset I doubted that Miss Klein had voluntarily departed with Lovejoy, despite that I believed she might be deeply in love with him. Such a move on the part of a deaf and dumb girl, who very soon would arrive at an age when she might do as she pleased, seemed utterly improbable."

Jimmie Coleman nodded acquiescence.

"The circumstances stated by Doctor Vantoon, however, quickly suggested a much more plausible theory to me," continued Boyd. "Miss Klein is an orphan, without relatives, but with a fortune held in trust by the Matfields for the past four years. It occurred to me, Jimmie, that they very possibly had misappropriated considerable of her money, that the impending settlement of her account would expose their crime, and that they had devised a scheme for removing the girl, either with a view to coerce her, or possibly to kill her, yet in so crafty a way as to avert their own incrimination."

"I see the point," nodded Coleman; "but it did not then occur to me."

"Yet several circumstances pointed to it, Jimmie. The girl could have departed as easily by daylight, if she had been so inclined, without going to the

trouble of drugging Jane Randall and escaping from the house through the latter's chamber. The utter needlessness of that suggested several possibilities which appeared to confirm my theory—a possibility that Jane Randall was lying; that she had been bribed to aid Abel Matfield; that she had not been drugged at all; that this pretense was only a part of their scheme; that she had lured the girl out of the house upon some pretext that night; and that the two men then had taken Miss Klein away."

"Easily accomplished, too, since she regarded all of them as friends," observed Coleman.

"That was another point," nodded Boyd. "Bear in mind, too, that the girl will be twenty in about two months, that the time was ripe for this move, assuming the fraud mentioned; and that it was at Matfield's suggestion that she was quartered at Doctor Vantoon's place. All of these points, Jimmie, seemed to confirm my suspicion, and I then went in search of tangible evidence by which to verify it."

"And you evidently found it, Felix!"

"Indeed, I did!" exclaimed Boyd, laughing. "I discovered, first of all, faint signs of earth, or clay, on the base-board of the rear entry, such as might have been left by the edge of a woman's skirt, if the latter was thus soiled, when she passed through the entry. Naturally this must have been left when she entered, not when she left, the house; and recalling that it had stormed a few hours before Miss Klein's departure, also that those rear stairs were only rarely used, I concluded that two women must have gone out that way, one of whom had returned with her skirts somewhat soiled. That could not have been Miss Klein, however, for it is improbable that she would have been allowed to return to the house after having been craftily lured out of it. So, Jimmie, it became plain enough that the Matfields had had a female confederate, than whom none was more likely than Jane Randall."

"Surely, Felix, surely."

"In the foot-path," continued Boyd.

"I found impressions plainly left by Miss Klein's boots. A little later, Jimmie, I found that Jane Randall wore a boot of the same size and style, also that the edge of one of the skirts in her closet was soiled with particles of clay, presumably taken up from the bespattered grass over which it had dragged, and over which you may have seen me pass my hand to learn whether it should be soiled in a corresponding way."

"Yes, yes, I recall that."

"In her chamber, Jimmie, I also found a pile of New York newspapers, all morning editions, and all open at the 'Personal' column. This gave me a clue, and after a very brief search I found in yesterday morning's paper a 'Personal' signed 'M,' and containing only the single line:

"To-night at one."

"Humph!" grunted Coleman. "Very significant."

"So significant, Jimmie, that I rightly inferred that a plot had previously been agreed upon by Abel Matfield and Jane Randall, that the press had been deemed less hazardous than the mails, and that the pile of papers indicated how faithfully the woman had watched for a 'Personal' telling her on what night the plot was to be carried out."

"That's plain enough, Felix. Anything more?"

"A few minor points, Jimmie," laughed Felix Boyd. "In the foot-path I also discovered prints of men's boots; two sizes, indicating how many had been engaged in the girl's abduction. At the river-bank, moreover, I discovered signs that a black boat of some sort had recently been at the landing you saw there. These bits of evidence completed my case and showed me the way. I was convinced that the Matfields had abducted the girl; that they had mailed some candy to her in a wrapper postmarked Yonkers, and inscribed it with a hand resembling that of Lovejoy, a forgery probably made possible by securing one of his letters to the girl, easily done by the Randall woman; and that the latter, after the

girl's abduction, had, in order to give color to the imposition, probably substituted some drugged candy for that which the box originally had contained."

"With a design to fix the abduction upon Lovejoy," growled Coleman grimly. "A rascally plot, certainly!"

"Having arrived at all of these conclusions, Jimmie, I reasoned that my only safe course would be to corner the Matfields without delay, and while they felt comparatively free from suspicion."

"I see the point, Felix."

"So I gave you a hint of my designs, Jimmie, under cover of giving you a line to the Yonkers chief of police," laughed Boyd. "That rid the place of you, my boy, and I then framed up an occasion for my own departure."

"And return, eh?" chuckled Coleman.

"Well, I meant to return all right," smiled Boyd. "With the help of Grady, the stableman, I perfected a disguise and secured a skiff to give color to the part I intended playing; and then I—ah, well, what need of more, Jimmie? You have seen how it turned out."

"Yes, rather!" Coleman grimly smiled. "It has landed the Matfields and Jane Randall behind the bars, all right, and driven them to a complete confession. Their whole scheme and their motives were about what you have stated, eh?"

"Yes, Jimmie, and what I suspected almost from the beginning. They have run through nearly half of Miss Klein's fortune, and now are booked to pay the penalty."

"Humph!" grunted the Central Office man. "There'll be in that but little consolation for the girl."

"She will have for consolation, Jimmie," said Boyd, "something far more dear to her than wealth—the love of a devoted husband, the house and home with which he will provide her, and possibly—God grant it!—the yearned-for acquirements promised her by Doctor Dudley Vantoon. In that case, Jimmie, her house no longer will be—a house of silence!"

The Way of the West

By Roland Ashford Phillips

It may be true that the wintry wind is not so unkind as man's ingratitude, but there are times when the practical expression of gratitude means loss to the man who is grateful. That is the situation which confronts one of the characters in this story



ADLEY found him face downward on the hot sands, half-dead from thirst and exposure, and carried him tenderly to his shack, nestled away among the hills near the desert edge.

For days he nursed him, watching the slow return of color and the gradual filling out of his sunken cheeks. And when, finally, the man sat up and his brain became clear, he told Hadley his story.

His name was Reese, and a year past he had started out West to rid himself of the dread white plague that already had taken such a deep hold upon him. He had attempted to cross the desert alone and unguided, had become lost, and wandered for days in the pitiless sun and sand, until he fell exhausted.

A week more and Reese was able to get out; to climb slowly and laboriously up the narrow trail that led to Hadley's prospect-hole. The way was steep and rough, and the footing insecure. A slight misstep would send one plunging headlong down the slope and over a steep precipice that walled in the river.

"A bad place," Hadley remarked one day, after watching Reese's efforts to gain the summit; "jes' let a bit of rock slide under your heel an' it's all off. There wouldn't be a whole bone in your body after you'd hit the bottom; an' more'n likely the rocks what followed you would clean cover up what remained. Save diggin' a grave." Hadley laughed.

Reese looked down and shuddered. "How far down is it?"

"Close on to three hundred feet—and see here!" He started a rock down the trail. It bounded and rolled, gathering in its wake an avalanche of small pieces, until, when the edge was reached, they disappeared with a roar out of sight. "God pity a man if he got caught there!"

As day after day passed and Reese felt his new-born strength coming back, he took his place alongside Hadley, and toiled from sun to sun, finding glory and satisfaction in his work. His long unused muscles swelled up beneath his brown skin, hard as the rock he dug, and heavy-corded as those of the village smithy of his boyhood days. The red blood bounded through his veins, and made all his body tingle with new-found strength. And in the early morning the winds, cool and pine-laden, swept off the mountain-tops—mysterious, snow-capped peaks they were, too—and he drank in full, intoxicating breaths that filled his lungs to the bursting.

Then would he rest upon his pick and dash the sweat-drops from his brown brow and thank God that he was at last a man—a man as only one can be who lives and sleeps close to nature; who uses the sun for a clock, the air for his wine, and the big, starred heavens for his roof.

Under the combined efforts of both men the hole steadily became deeper, until finally a windlass was needed to hoist the rock. Then they took turns, one at the bottom, the other at the top. Hadley's hope never deserted him, no

matter how discouraging the rock looked. "I'm sure the stuff's down there," he'd exclaim, bending low over a bit of new color. "All we've got to do is to keep at it."

Early one morning Hadley, who was working at the bottom, called to Reese to hoist away. The moment his head appeared above ground he let out a yell: "We've struck it, pard; and it's fine color, the best I've seen; and it's goin' to run pretty high in yellow, too."

Reese became as excited as the miner, although knowing nothing about rock value, and eagerly asked what was to be done now.

"It's a hundred miles to camp," Hadley answered; "but I reckon I can make it in a week, there and back. I want to have it assayed, and get the right values."

So it was made up between them that Reese was to stay at the hole while Hadley went to camp. An hour later the miner leaped to his saddle and found the stirrups. "Keep at the vein; get out as much rock as possible," he instructed Reese finally. "I'll be back in a week if nothin' happens."

Reese watched him ride away, and a strange feeling of loneliness crept over him in spite of their good fortune. After supper, he brought out a chair, leaned up against the hut, and watched the twilight creep down the sky, settle blue in the valleys, then rise again up the mountainsides, until they, too, faded into misty, cloudlike forms; and only the stars remained. Alone with these, his thoughts went back to his home and wife and babe. He wondered vaguely if he was to remain here forever and never see them again. Perhaps they thought him dead.

If he could only send word that he was well and strong again, then it wouldn't be so hard. But he had no money, nor did he know where to send, nor how. Then would it not be cowardly to leave Hadley, who had done so much for him; had saved him from death; and had nursed him back to health? Perhaps so, but Hadley did not know how hard it was to stay away from all that made life worth while.

And so the bitter thoughts piled up, and that night when he went to bed his pillow was wet, for he was only a man, after all, and men at the most are but children grown up.

The week passed slowly. When the last of the seven days dawned he grew a bit happier at the thought of Hadley's return, and along in the afternoon he saw a figure down the cañon which at first glance he took to be Hadley's. But as he came nearer he saw it was a stranger. The rider drew rein in front of where Reese stood at the cabin door.

"Afternoon, stranger," he began. "I'm the sheriff of Puma, and I'm after a certain man who I've reason to think is hidin' 'round these parts somewhere. Hadley's his name—Jim Hadley—know anything concernin' him?"

Reese drew in a long, deep breath, and set his teeth hard together; other than that he made no move or sound, for he knew the eyes of the sheriff were upon him.

After waiting a moment for Reese to speak, the sheriff swung down, seated himself on a rock, and mopped his face with a handkerchief.

"Shot a man," he went on, "over in Puma last year—shot him in cold blood, for no cause whatever. Lost him for months. Got a hint last week he was somewhere 'round here—prospectin' in these hills. Seen him?"

"What's his description?" Reese asked.

"Tall and bony, kind face, large nose, very coarse black hair; chances are he's grown a beard now—that'll change him a lot."

"You say he killed a man?"

"Killed him—shot him plumb through the heart—fellow never moved; Hadley skipped then. Things kind of died down. Killin's always do out here; I kept my ears and eyes open, though—big reward offered."

Reese's eyes grew hard, and a cowardly thought leaped to his brain.

"Reward?" he asked quickly.

"Yep; two thousand dollars," the sheriff returned.

Two thousand dollars! Enough to

take him back home, to his wife and his babe! Enough to pay off all the debts, and then have a tidy sum left! And all he needed to do was to give up his friend.

"If I should put you on his track," he asked, "what then?"

"Half the reward's yours."

Poor Reese! he stood divided between love of his friend and the desire to return to his wife. Yet why hesitate? If Hadley had really killed this man, as the sheriff said, why should he not be punished? His kindness did not atone for his wrong-doing.

Reese's wife and home cried out for him. They were without money—without friends. He could not turn a deaf ear to it all. To give up a guilty man to justice, to have him punished for his crime—this was no more than right. And the reward—a thousand dollars—meant a quick home-going; the sight of all that was dear to him. The money would set him up in business again.

No, he could not hesitate. Hadley's kindness had been paid in hard work, and he owed no more to him. The law of the land must be upheld, at any cost, despite friendship ties, however tender and loving they might be. The murderer must be given to justice.

"Hadley lives here—in this house with me; he will be home this evening. You hide; up at the shaft is a good place. After he gets here, come down. He won't be suspicious, and the arrest will be an easy matter."

The sheriff stuck out his hand. "Good, very good; it means a thousand each for us."

Reese took the offered hand and gripped it hard.

"It's rather tough"—the sheriff smiled at Reese's white face—"to give up a pard, and one that's been with you for a space—rather tough, but it's no more than right; a country ain't no country if there's no law."

The sun dropped behind the highest peaks, and the blue twilight sifted over everything. The sheriff led his horse around out of sight in the bend of the cañon and came back. Reese led the

way up the trail, the sheriff at his heels.

"Blame ticklish place this," he said, after the top was reached. "I saw a shoot-the-chutes once, out at 'Frisco, jus' like this, only they tax you a dime there—reckon it's free here!" He laughed, but Reese remained very quiet.

Behind the dump the sheriff hid, and Reese retraced his steps to the shack. He entered and lit a candle, started a fire, and put on the bacon. He did not allow himself to think. He began to whistle, but it sounded so hard and unnatural that he gave it up.

When the bacon was sizzling he went outside and listened. Distant hoofbeats of a fast-ridden horse came to his ear, growing louder and more distinct each instant. He knew it was Hadley.

As he came out of the mists he raised himself in the stirrups and called out loudly: "The greatest find in the country, Reese! A thousand dollars to the ton! There's a million ton down there!"

Reese's heart quickened in spite of himself, and again a cowardly thought sprang up that after Hadley's arrest he would come back and work the property. Hadley dismounted, removed the saddle and bridle, the beast taking its way to the shed.

"I rode full clip all the way in, I was so excited. There'll be a stampede to this part of the district soon's the news leaks out." Hadley laughed almost wildly. "We're millionaires now."

"We?" Reese shrank back dazed.

"Why, of course, you and I. Did you think you wasn't in on the deal? I ain't that sort of a man. It's pardners we are."

"Hadley—why—" Reese's voice wavered—"you don't mean—that half the gold's mine—not half?"

"Sure, half." And Hadley took him by the shoulder and led the way into the shack. "Gee! that bacon smells good—let's eat."

They sat down. Reese could not

eat, try as he would. He kept his eye on the door. Ah! if only he had sent the sheriff away; why—why did he ever tell? He was a millionaire now. Yet he was to see Hadley arrested, and perhaps hanged. And how good he had been to him; how good! And what a low, despicable coward he was! How the world would cry out against him if it but knew!

"I'll begin to live now," Hadley began between mouthfuls, "I'm goin' back to Colorado. There's a woman there—the one woman in all the world for me, and she's waitin'. She promised to wait, and I know she'll keep her word. I told her I'd come back some day, and I guess it's here now."

Reese's breath came hard, his eyes were glued on the door. "Did—did you love her?" he managed to get out.

"Love her?" Hadley's eyes fairly blazed. "Love her? Why, no man ever loved a woman like I do her—no man. Why, I killed a man once for callin' her a low name. Yes, sir, killed

him, a dirty Mexican. They chased me out of the place 'cause they didn't understand. Reckon if I'd go back there now I'd be strung up, but I ain't goin'. I'd do it again, too, for I love her. You know what love is, don't you, pard? You understand, 'cause you're a good honest and true man. You——"

A roar came to their ears, a roar that increased in volume each instant. Both leaped to their feet and made for the door, Reese in the lead. In the twilight a mass of rocks came sliding down the slope. Reese saw something white among them—the terrible realization came to him, but he spoke not. He was trembling like a leaf in the breeze. The roar became deafening, the mass swept by, shooting far out over the precipice, then everything became still.

"I wonder what in the devil started that slide?" Hadley asked, as they entered the shack. But Reese did not answer. A light shone in his eyes, and in the silence of his heart he offered up a prayer.



A VOW OF SILENCE

A DROLL story is narrated of a dog to which the power of speech was seemingly given by the art of a ventriloquist.

The dog and his master one day arrived at a country hotel. The man had only a quarter in his pocket. He sat down at a table and prepared to order a meal.

"Well, what will you have?" asked the landlord.

The ventriloquist gave his order, and then, turning to the dog, he asked:

"What will you have?"

"I'll take a ham-sandwich," the dog seemed to answer.

The hotel-keeper was breathless for a moment with astonishment.

"What did you say?" he asked.

"I said a ham-sandwich."

The landlord was so impressed by the talking of the dog that he offered twenty dollars for it. This was declined, the owner of the dog holding out for fifty dollars, which the landlord eventually paid. As the ventriloquist was leaving the place, the dog turned to him and apparently said:

"You wretch! to sell me for fifty dollars. I will never speak another word!" And he never did.

The Rockspur Nine

A STORY FOR OUR YOUNGER READERS

By Burt L. Standish

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT HAPPENED BEHIND THE ACAD-
EMY.



JOHN seemed to shake and settle himself together as Walter Mayfair came to the plate. Then he dazed Walt by speed and curves, and the high hopes of the regulars were dashed to the ground when the hitter quickly struck out.

Rockspur had been to bat four times without making a score or a hit! The players looked at each other in speechless horror, slowly and sadly returning to the field.

Scott did his level best, and prevented Lobsterville from adding another score to those already obtained, the side quickly going out.

"Now, boys," said Sterndale, as the regulars gathered at the bench again, "we must get in and win it out in this last inning. If we do not, we'd better disband, for we'll never hear the last of it."

Unfortunately, however, Jotham Sprout and Thad Boland were the two first strikers. Jotham fell all over himself in his endeavor to make a hit, and struck out. Thad could not get his bat round quickly enough for the speedy balls, and he fell a victim.

White with fury, Rob Linton came up for the last time, and crowded close to the rubber.

"Will you please stand back a little?" asked John. "You are too near the plate."

"Mind your business and pitch the ball!" snarled Rob.

"Mr. Umpire," appealed John, "make him stand back."

The umpire did so, but Linton stepped up the moment he saw John make a motion to deliver the ball. He stepped directly in front of the ball, which happened to be an in shoot, and it struck him a glancing blow on the ribs.

For a moment Linton doubled up, pressing his hand to his side. Then, his face working with rage, he advanced four steps into the diamond and hurled his bat at John Smith's head.

John ducked, and the bat went whistling over his head, but, as he straightened up, his furious enemy came rushing at him and struck him a glancing blow on the cheek, making him stagger. Linton followed John up and tried to hit him again, but the tall lad quickly recovered, and, guarding against the second blow, swung hard and sure with his left, his fist landing between Rob's eyes, and dropping him to the ground.

Then players and spectators swarmed onto the diamond, the ball-game ending in what came near being a riot. John suddenly found he had a large number of friends, who were greatly angered over Linton's foul attack. This was a surprise to him, for, before the beginning of the game, he had believed himself almost friendless.

Bentley and some of Linton's associates picked up the fallen player and were urging him to continue the assault. But he did not need any urging, for, as soon as he recovered from his dazed condition, he tried to leap at

Smith's throat. Sterndale prevented, standing between them.

"You're dead wrong, Lint," Dick declared. "Hold up, now! You have no right to attack Smith."

"He hit me with the ball!" panted Rob, trying to get past the sturdy form of the broad-shouldered captain and reach John, who was standing quite still, watching him closely.

"That was an accident," asserted Sterndale.

"Nothing of the sort!" snarled the enraged fellow. "He did it on purpose! I know he did, and I'll wipe up the ground with him!"

"Oh, Oi dunno!" grinned Dennis Murphy. "Ye've not made much av a succiss av it so fur, me b'y."

"Let them fight! Let them fight!"

The cry came from various quarters, and the crowd was eager for the encounter, but John Smith said:

"I don't want to fight. I want to be let alone. I hit him with the ball by accident."

"But it wur no accidint whin ye hit him wid yer fist, me lad," chuckled Dennis.

Powers was at John's side, and he spoke a few low words into the tall lad's ear. This was what he said:

"Now is your time to prove that you ain't no coward and fix this feller so he'll let you alone in the future. If ye keep cool and remember what I have learnt ye, ye can thrash the stuffing out of him."

"But I don't want to fight," John persisted, remembering his promise to his mother. "I won't fight."

"They'll think you're a coward."

"I don't care."

Linton was still struggling to reach John, but, finding he could not do so, he cried:

"You're a low-born cur, Smith! If you had blood in your body, you'd fight me! You're a coward!"

"But I'm not coward enough to throw a bat at anybody the way you did," returned John. "I don't mind being called a coward by you."

"You're a sneak! Your father is an old fool, and your mother——"

"Stop!" cried John, his voice low and hard. "You may call me what you like, but don't speak of my mother!"

But Linton found he had touched a tender spot, and John's warning simply spurred him to further insults. What he said caused John Smith to turn pale and tremble like a leaf. He turned to Powers, saying in a low tone:

"I'll fight him, but not here—not here. I don't want all this crowd looking on. You fix it, Mr. Powers."

And thus it happened that, something less than an hour later, John Smith and Rob Linton met behind the academy to fight. Rob had overstepped the limit on the ball-ground, but now that the fight was ready to begin, John regretted having agreed to meet his enemy.

A thin slice of a moon hung in the western sky, and the twilight of the perfect summer evening was sweet with the smell of new-mown hay. From some dark trees on the farther edge of the hay-field came the sobbing plaint of a lonely whip-poor-will.

At least twenty persons had gathered to witness the fight, forming a circle about the two lads, who, stripped to shirts and trousers, were facing each other.

It had astonished Rob to think he had been able to drive John into a fight, for it had been his belief that the tall lad would not dare to face him under any circumstances. Now he was resolved to make short work of the encounter.

"I'll do him up in two minutes," he confidently told Leon Bentley, who, for the time at least, had put aside his feelings of resentment against his former chum and consented to act as his second.

Sterndale was referee, and he averred that he was determined to see fair play. Both lads had agreed to fight with nothing but their fists.

"Ready?" asked Sterndale.

"All ready," came the instant response from Bentley.

"Ready here," spoke the deep voice of Powers, who was acting as John's second.

The two boys stepped toward each

other. Powers speaking a last low word of advice to Smith.

"Go at him instanter," directed the old-time pitcher. "Keep your head, but push him from the start. He thinks he has a snap, and he'll be careless. If you rush him, you may end the fight in short order."

John scarcely heard. His heart was thumping furiously in his bosom, and he felt his whole body trembling. Then he shut his teeth hard, and attempted to regain perfect command of himself. He was not afraid, and he knew it, yet he shook.

"I'll simply defend myself," was his thought. "I did wrong to get into this, but I can't back out now. It's not my fault! It's not my fault!"

"Shake hands," commanded Sterndale.

"With him?" grated Rob. "Never! Look out for yourself, Smith!"

As he spoke he sprang at John, leading off on the instant, expecting to get in a heavy blow at the very start, but he was greatly surprised when, with slight effort, but remarkable swiftness, the tall youth stepped aside and avoided his charge.

"Won't do you any good to dodge," muttered Rob, whirling. "Stand up and take your medicine, you sneak!"

He closed in, leading again, but Smith guarded and worked around to the right, again avoiding the blow. Linton followed as closely as he could.

"Give them room," pleaded the referee, forcing the eager spectators back. "Don't crowd up."

"Nail him, Lint!" urged Leon Bentley. "Don't fool with him a minute!"

Rob was surprised by the rather easy manner in which John avoided his rushes and blows, but, not getting any blows in return, he reasoned that his antagonist was frightened.

Powers was provoked by the behavior of his pupil, for John had not taken his advice.

"Get back at him, boy!" he exclaimed. "Don't let him do all the hitting! Smash him!"

John did not seem to hear; at least, he took no heed. But it was impossible

for him to continue to avoid all of Linton's blows, and Rob finally hit him on the mouth, cutting his lips and starting the blood.

Even that was not enough to arouse the tall lad fully and make him forget his promise not to fight; but, seeing his advantage, Linton followed it up, striking again and again.

"Now you're doing it, Linton," cried Bentley exultantly. "Give it to him! You've got him going."

"It looks thot way," muttered Dennis Murphy regretfully. "Smith hasn't a bit av foight in him at all, at all."

Dennis, having expected something different from John, was sorely disappointed; but his disappointment was no greater than that experienced by Mart Powers, who saw that his pupil was taking little advantage of the instructions he had received in the science of sparring.

Linton's friends were urging him on; and, thinking he would soon end the encounter, Rob struck harder and faster than ever. As he had felt no blows in return, he became quite reckless of his own person, and it made Powers groan to see how many chances to get in telling work were neglected or ignored by John.

A cry went up, for Smith fell to his knees, spitting blood. Sterndale sprang between the fighting lads just in time to prevent Linton from hitting John while down.

"None of that," he sternly exclaimed. "It's barred. Give him a show."

"Then let him get up—let him get up!" panted Rob.

John staggered to his feet, and Rob was at him again. This time Linton landed fair with his left, and Smith went down.

Sterndale began counting, while Powers bent over John and imploringly exclaimed:

"Get up and go at him, boy—do! Are you going to let him whip ye ag'in? They'll have a right to call ye a coward!"

Barely had that word passed Mart's lips when John Smith leaped up, get-

ting on to his feet before Dick finished counting. A transformation had come upon him. With a toss of his head, he flung back his hair, as a lion might fling back its mane. His eyes, on which the moonlight made a cold steel glint, fixed themselves on Rob Linton, and he met Rob's rush half-way.

Linton was surprised to see John get up, but he was even more surprised when, attempting to close in, he received a terrible left-hand jolt on the jaw.

John, having struck his first blow, flung off all restraint, forgetting his promise to his mother, forgetting everything except that before him was his hated enemy, the one fellow who had caused him more humiliation and done him more harm than all others in the world.

Before Linton could recover from that blow on the jaw, John struck him again, sending him staggering. Then, his teeth clenched, the tall lad followed his foe up, getting in yet another swinging stroke, and Rob went down in a heap.

There was a shout of surprise, for the sudden turn of the fight was quite unexpected by everybody, and few of those present could believe the evidence of their eyes.

Bewildered and astounded, Bentley grasped the fallen boy by the shoulder, shaking him roughly, and crying:

"Up, Linton—up and at the duffer!"

Rob needed no urging, amazed though he was by what had happened to him. He gathered himself swiftly and leaped to his feet. John being in waiting, the fight was resumed with redoubled fury.

For several minutes they gave each other unmerciful punishment, but neither of them weakened. In the shadows the whip-poor-will wept over this display of evil passions, but not one of that excited throng behind the village academy heard his plaintive lament.

There were sodden blows, panting breaths, thudding feet, and two leaping, turning, dancing figures, throwing faint, fantastic shadows on the short-grass turf.

Then one of them went down again, and again that one was Rob Linton.

With clenched hands, his bruised lips drawn back from his blood-stained teeth, John Smith stood there waiting for his enemy to rise. He did not hear Powers' words of praise, nor see Dennis Murphy dancing for joy. He saw Bentley kneeling by Linton and trying to get him up.

But John Smith's enemy had been struck full and fair on the point of the jaw, and Sterndale slowly counted him out.

"It's all over," said Dick to John. "You do not have to fight any more. You've won."

"I'm sorry," was the answer, in a hard, even tone of voice. "I've just begun to fight. I'm sorry he can't get up and take some more."

And John Smith turned regretfully from his fallen enemy.

They offered him congratulations, but he was silent; they tried to shake his hand, but he turned away.

"Why, you're a ho-ho-ho-holy terror, Smith!" spluttered Danny Chatterton, in frank astonishment. "Dud-dud-dud-dud-dished if I thought it was in you!"

"You've cooked Linton's goose," whispered Walter Mayfair into John's ears. "He'll let you alone now."

"Old man, you're a wonder!" said Sterndale openly. "How you ever learned all those blows and ducks and parries and counters and cuts and guards is what I can't understand."

"Ye're surprised that he thrashed Linton," chuckled Dennis; "but Oi knew he could do ut all th' toime."

"He is my pupil," put in Powers, with pride. "I taught him to spar, and he'll be a match for any fellow under twenty in the State if he keeps at it for a year."

"You must have taught him to pitch," said Dick.

"I did that, too," nodded Mart, willing to take all the credit they would give him. "And not a single hit did you fellers git off him in the game."

"He does great credit to his instructor," declared the captain of the Rockspur nine.

As soon as possible, John stole away from them and hurried toward home. The feeling of excitement and fury had passed from him, and a sensation of guilt and shame was taking its place. He knew now that, although he had fought with cool ferocity, he had been possessed by a demon of anger that robbed him for the time of every feeling of compassion, forbearance, or mercy, and turned him into a pitiless animal. The moment he started to strike back at his enemy he ceased to feel the blows he received, which simply seemed to make him more furious and irresistible. In that moment all the humiliations and injuries Rob Linton had heaped upon him took possession of his soul, and cast out the remembrance of that promise to his mother, which had so often held him in check.

Now it was over, and, walking slowly homeward, his blood was given time to cool. The savage joy of triumph over his hated enemy died out of his heart, and he remembered that his mother would be waiting for him to return. How could he meet her pained and reproachful gaze? How could he tell her what he had done?

But if John Smith had courage to fight, he also had courage to tell his mother the whole miserable story; and she, good, sensible woman, although sorry, could not find it in her heart to chide her boy.

CHAPTER XXIX.

BENTLEY HAS HIS WAY.

Probably no one, not even Rob Linton himself, was more astonished and disgusted over the result of the fight behind the academy than was Leon Bentley. For some time the cigarette-smoking pitcher of the Rockspur Club had regarded John Smith with dislike and disdain, but now he hated and feared him as a possible rival. He had urged Rob on, thinking the encounter would have quite a different outcome; and when it was over he was the first to turn from his former friend and express his contempt and disgust.

"I did think he had better stuff in him," he said, as he struck a match and lighted a cigarette. "He's let that Lobsterville lubber do him up, and now he'd better crawl into a hole and stay there."

"Ain't ye goin' to look after him?" asked Jotham Sprout. "He's your friend."

"Let him look out for himself," retorted Leon. "He's no friend of mine." And he walked away.

As soon as he could recover his strength, Rob started for home. Some of the boys sought to express sympathy, but he walked on with his head down, speaking no word in return. His aspect was one of the deepest shame.

For two days after that Rob kept out of sight, dreading to be seen by his former associates. He nursed a pair of swollen and discolored eyes, doing his best to hasten the healing of the bruises and marks upon his face.

He had heard Bentley's words of scorn concerning him after the fight, and so it happened that he was not a little surprised when, on the evening of the second day following, he saw Bentley come hastily up the street and stop at the front-yard fence. Rob was reclining in a hammock swung beneath some trees near the house, and he sat up.

"Hello, Linton!" called Bentley, who, as usual, was smoking. "I want to see you."

"What do you want to see me about?" asked Rob shortly. "You know I'm no friend of yours."

He said this with angry sarcasm, but Leon did not seem to heed his tone or manner, as he answered:

"It's important. There's a job put up on us, and I've come to tell you about it."

"What kind of a job?" asked Rob, getting out of the hammock.

"Sterndale's planning to take that fellow onto the nine."

Rob did not have to ask what fellow; he knew perfectly well whom Bentley meant.

"Well, if Dick's made up his mind," he said, "what are you going to do

about it?" He walked down to the fence.

"Do?" exclaimed the boy outside savagely. "Why, we'll stop it!"

"I don't see how."

"I do. Come, Linton, you must stand by me; we must stand together. I know I was angry after the fight, and I suppose I said something nasty; but we've stuck together in the past, and we must do so now. You have said this fellow Smith was the Jonah of the nine, and you have declared that you would not play on the same team with him. All I want of you is to stand by your word. Will you do that?"

"Why, yes, of course. But——"

"Then we'll fix this business," asserted Leon, with confidence. "They are down at the office now, and they're going to decide it to-night."

"But there are only two of us, and——"

"Three," Bentley again interrupted. "I've got Renwood to stand in with us."

"But still there will be two to one against us, if all the others vote to take Smith on."

"That's all right; we'll fix them. We'll say they may take Jonah on, but we'll get off, and we'll make it plain that we mean business. That will bring them to time, for they can't afford to lose three men in a bunch. All we have to do is keep a stiff back-bone, and we'll carry the day."

"How does it happen that Renwood will vote against Smith?"

"That's all right. I settled it with him."

Leon did not explain how he had "settled it," but the truth was that Dolph Renwood fancied he could pitch some himself, and he feared he might not have an opportunity to try his hand if John Smith was taken back onto the team.

"I don't like to show myself much now," said Rob, lifting a hand to his face and flushing.

"Never mind that," urged Leon. "You look all right. We must get a hustle on. Come along, Lint."

So it happened that Rob Linton, ap-

pearing that night at the meeting of the Rockspur nine, stood firmly with Bentley and Renwood in opposition to the restoration of John Smith. When it was found that this trio actually meant to withdraw from the club if John was taken back, Sprout and Chatterton weakened, so that a majority voted against the motion.

Sterndale pretended to be satisfied with their decision, but it is safe to say that he was not, for he knew the weakness of the team lay in the pitcher's box, and he had hoped to give John a trial there.

Thus it came about that, although John was treated with considerable respect by the fellows who had mocked and sneered at him a short time before, he was not asked to play with the nine until catastrophe befell the club in the form of an overwhelming defeat at the hands of Highland.

When next they faced the Highlanders on the ground of the latter, they found themselves battling against a new pitcher who had lately come into the town. Stubby Fisher had been bad enough, but this new man completely demoralized Rockspur, only four safe hits being obtained off his delivery during the game. The final score stood seventeen to three in favor of Highland, Bentley having "gone to pieces" in the closing innings, receiving a terrible hammering.

Once more a crestfallen crowd returned from Highland and slipped into Rockspur as quietly as possible.

But Dick Sterndale's mind was set on one thing; he would give Smith an opportunity in the next game, even though half the nine revolted. He resolved to find other players to fill the places of those who withdrew.

CHAPTER XXX.

THROUGH PERIL TO REPENTANCE.

Dora Deland and Agnes Mayfair were baseball enthusiasts; their friends laughingly called them "cranks." They understood the game very well, and it was seldom that they missed any fine points of the playing.

Although they had long been fast friends, several times they came near quarreling over John Smith. Agnes was as honest and open as a summer day, but Dora could not be so readily fathomed, and she sometimes took pleasure in teasing and tormenting her best friends.

It was shortly after the disastrous ball-game at Highland that the girls decided to give the members of the ball-team a picnic dinner on High Bluff, a great cliff of rocks that rose steep and grim from the edge of the sea just outside the harbor north of Rockspur.

Dora thought at first that it would be best to wait till after the deciding game of ball between Highland and Rockspur, promising to give the members of the home team a picnic-dinner if they won; but Agnes argued that the boys should be encouraged and shown sympathy at the time when they were downhearted over their defeat, so that, knowing their friends had confidence in them, they would brace up and strain every nerve to win the last game. This argument finally prevailed, and preparations were made for the dinner.

Then, for a little time, came another discussion, for Agnes insisted on inviting John Smith, and to this Dora objected.

"He's not one of the nine," insisted Dora.

"He has been," retorted Agnes.

"That doesn't make any difference, Aggie; he is not now."

"He will be before the next game with Highland is played," declared the dark-eyed girl.

"Oh, nonsense! The idea! What do they want of him?"

"They can't get along without him."

Dora tossed back her head and laughed over this, but John's determined little champion persisted:

"It's the truth, Dode. Walt says so. They wanted to take him back before the last game, but Rob Linton and Leon Bentley refused to play with him. Walt says John Smith is the best pitcher in this town, and he'll be given a chance in the very next game. Not one of

them could get a safe hit off him when he pitched for the Lobsterville team."

Dora pretended to laugh in a very merry manner, crying:

"I can't imagine John Smith pitching. What a sight he would be! Your brother has been joking you, Aggie."

But at last, finding Agnes would not give up the idea of including John, Dora yielded.

The boys were invited to come to High Bluff at eleven on the morning of the picnic, each invitation being sent out separately and worded in a rather mysterious manner.

John Smith received one of these mysterious invitations, which surprised him greatly. He puzzled over it not a little, noting the girlish handwriting, and wondering what it could mean. At last he decided to accept the invitation, or to investigate, at least.

So it happened that on the day of the picnic, dressed in his best summer clothes, John crossed the bridge, climbed Academy Hill, passed the ball-ground, and struck out toward High Bluff, on the crest of which was a pleasant little grove.

Although the sun was shining brightly when he reached an elevation where he could look out beyond the harbor, he saw the surge of an "old sea" breaking white and tumultuous over Coffin Ledge and Tiger Tooth Ledge, and he could hear it booming against the foot of High Bluff. Entering the grove, he approached his destination, wondering if he had been made the victim of a poor joke.

As he advanced, he heard the sound of girlish voices calling in a distant part of the grove near the bluff, and he turned in that direction.

Picnic-parties had met there before, and there were some rudely constructed tables beneath the trees in a spot where the cool breezes came in from the sea. Drawing near, John paused, for he saw several girls flitting about beneath the trees, busily arranging and decorating the picnic-tables, which were covered with white cloths and prepared for an open-air banquet.

It was a pretty scene, and John was

not a little amazed by it. He looked around for others of the male sex, but saw none, which set him to wondering if he were the only boy invited. Among the girls was Agnes Mayfair, and he knew quite well that his invitation had come from her.

John was about to draw back, fearing to be seen, and undecided on what course he should pursue, when there came a sudden wild scream of terror from a short distance beyond the picnic-ground, and he saw a girl running swiftly toward the others. It was Dora Deland, distracted with fear, and John heard her cry:

"Oh, girls, girls! come quick! Rob's fallen over the bluff! He's hanging to a bush! What can we do? What can we do?"

John's heart gave a great leap. There was but one Rob in Rockspur whom she could mean; that was Rob Linton. A distant cry for help came to his ears, and then he sprang forward.

The girls heard him crash through some underbrush, and saw him coming, upon which Dora cried to him:

"Help! help! This way!"

She turned and ran back toward the bluff, but, swift though her feet flew, John reached and passed her. Coming to the edge of the great bluff, he looked over and saw, not ten feet away, Rob Linton desperately clinging to a bush that grew in a crevice of the rocks. The unfortunate fellow had fallen while reaching over the edge of the precipice to pluck for Dora Deland a wild flower growing some little distance below; but, by rare good fortune, he had grasped the flowering bush and clung to it.

Now, however, as John Smith noted at a glance, the roots of the bush were gradually yielding under the strain upon them, and, in a very few moments, they must give way.

Rob Linton knew this also, and the face he turned upward to the boy above him was bleached with horror. Far beneath him the sea was battering and thundering against the foot of the cliff, its sound filling his shuddering heart

with sickening fear. He felt the bush give a little more, and some tiny pebbles and particles of dirt rattled down and struck him in the face.

When the eyes of the two boys met, Rob chokingly gasped:

"Oh, John, help me—save me! Quick! The bush is breaking!"

John gave one glance around, and his eyes fastened upon a small sapling that grew near the edge of the cliff. This he grasped and bent to the ground, throwing himself flat on his face at the brink of the bluff. Clinging to the sapling, he wiggled forward, with the upper part of his body over the edge of the bluff, and reached downward with his free hand.

"Quick!" again gasped Rob, as the bush cracked and more pebbles rattled down.

But John found it was going to be a most difficult thing to retain his position on the top of the bluff and give his imperiled enemy any aid, for, stretching far downward as he did, he could barely reach Rob's hands. If he ventured to stretch yet farther over the edge, he might lose his balance, and it was certain that he would be unable to draw Linton up without assistance.

Still John did not hesitate, for he saw that he must get hold of Rob quickly if he would prevent a tragedy. He squirmed forward still farther and firmly grasped one of Rob's wrists. Immediately Linton released his hold on the bush with his other hand, and clutched John's wrist in turn.

The sudden shock of the dangling lad's entire weight nearly caused John to lose his balance and go over the edge of the bluff. Rob saw this, and cried out with choking horror.

No sound came from John Smith's lips. His jaws set like iron, he clung fast to the small sapling, at the same time retaining his hold on Linton's wrist. He felt his body slip a bit farther over the edge, and he put all his strength of will and muscle into the task of retaining his position.

"Can't you pull me up?" whispered Rob, his lips blanched.

"I am afraid not," answered John

steadily; "but I will try. Hold fast to my wrist."

He did try, but his efforts simply served to carry him a bit farther over the edge, and he ceased trying, feeling that he would go over entirely if he continued to struggle. His position was so strained that he found it utterly impossible to exert his full strength.

Rob was choking with terror now. He looked down and saw the ragged rocks below, with the water beating upon them, the spectacle sending a shudder over him.

"We're both going down!" he gasped. Then, in that moment of frightful peril, a strange change came upon him. All the selfishness of his passionate nature seemed to expire in a moment as he realized the full meaning of his position. What right had he to drag another down to death, and that other the boy he had hated, humiliated, and injured? He thought how, without hesitation, John had hastened to attempt his rescue, and his mingled shame and gratitude turned him in that moment of deadly danger into a hero.

"John," he whispered, "I've got to go for it. You can't pull me up."

"Wait!" panted the boy above. "I'll try again in a moment."

"No, it's no use. You can't do it. If you try again, we'll both go over. I won't drag you down with me. You must let me go. I'm sorry, John—I'm sorry I ever called you Jonah. Forgive me, John—please! Hold on just a moment more!"

Those words touched the heart of John Smith as it had never been touched before, and a great determination came upon him to hold on to the last gasp—to never, never let go his hold, even though he knew he must go down with Linton.

"I'll hold on as long as I live!" he declared, through his clenched teeth. "I won't let you go, Rob!"

Their eyes met again, and in that moment of peril all the bitterness of the past was blotted out.

Till now, the frightened girls had not offered assistance, but Agnes Mayfair,

seeing something must be done, caught hold of John's clothing, calling to the other girls to aid her. They did so, and thus John was kept from going over the brink.

Then Sterndale and Scott, who had been approaching together, heard the cries of the terrified girls, and came dashing toward the spot. When they arrived, little time was lost in giving John aid. They drew him upward and backward till Dick could reach down and get hold of Rob, and then Linton was dragged up over the brink to safety.

Both lads sank exhausted on the ground, where they lay for some moments, while Dick and Don heard the story from the lips of the girls. At last John got up, and Linton also arose. They were face to face, and, in a choked voice, Rob said:

"Smith, I owe you my life! I know I've used you mighty mean in the past, and I'm ashamed of it now. Won't you forgive and forget? Won't you shake hands?"

John took the extended hand of the boy who had been his enemy, but his heart was too full for words.

Appearing on the scene just then, Leon Bentley, with inexpressible astonishment and dismay, beheld this tableau.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE TIME OF TRIAL.

By skilful advertising, Sterndale worked up great interest in the final game between Rockspur and Highland, and on the afternoon set for the deciding contest there was a general rush for the Rockspur ball-ground.

In order to induce Walker to agree to the drawing of "lots" to decide where the final game should be played, Dick had proposed a division of the gate-money by the two teams, the winners taking sixty per cent., while forty per cent. went to the losers. This being settled on, Walker had not felt very bad when Highland lost the privilege of having the game at home, for Rockspur was certain to turn out twice as

many paying spectators as it was possible to get at Highland.

As the time for the game to begin approached, a perfect stream of people poured in through the gate, cheerfully paying the amount charged for admission. Sterndale had aroused interest by the report that a new pitcher would be in the box for Rockspur. The grand stand filled, the bleachers were crowded, and a railed-off space was occupied by persons standing.

Again Highland had sent over a great throng of enthusiasts to witness the game and "root" for the crimson, the two clubs having retained their school colors. The visitors were filled with the utmost confidence, for, judging by the last game between the clubs, they believed their new pitcher would toy with Rockspur at his pleasure. They were prepared to enjoy their triumph to the fullest extent, having brought horns and flags.

Sterndale had promised the Rockspur crowd a surprise, and it was reported that he had secured for that game a great college pitcher, who was spending a few weeks camping with some friends on Pine Island, at Lake Glenwood, within the limits of the town.

Leon Bentley had been asked to sit in uniform on the bench as a change pitcher, but this he indignantly refused to do, upon which he was informed that he would not be needed. He had made a last desperate attempt to show his power by influencing Renwood and Linton, but, Rob standing firm by the club, a quarrel between the former chums ensued. Bentley also found himself unable to govern Renwood, Sterndale having had a talk with the latter, and Leon was the angriest and most disgusted fellow in all Rockspur. It was his dearest wish that the home team should be terribly beaten.

The spectators noted that John Smith was on the field with the Rockspur players. Lee Walker observed this on entering the gate, and called to John:

"Hello, Smith, old man! So you're ag'in' us to-day? Well, I'm sorry for

you. If you'd accepted my offer, you might be playing with the winning side."

"Thank you," said John, with something like a smile. "You're quite a fellow to count chickens before they're hatched."

"That's all right," laughed Lee, coming up to John. "Say, where's this great pitcher Rockspur is going to put against us to-day? I'll bet my hat he isn't in it with our man Herrick."

"I don't know anything about any great pitcher," answered John truthfully. "How did you hear such a yarn?"

"Oh, we're onto you fellows—we know all about it. Don't think you're going to spring any surprise on us. Is the fellow from Dartmouth or Bowdoin?"

"Neither."

"Oh, well, you needn't tell! It won't make a bit of difference. Herrick will show him up." And the confident Highland captain walked away toward the spot where Sterndale was giving the batting-list to the scorer.

"He'll be surprised when he finds out," thought John, with a smile.

No one paid much attention to John, who warmed up by throwing the ball while the rest of the team took field practise. Everybody seemed looking for the new pitcher, expecting to see a stranger.

Practise for both sides was over in a short time, and then, having won the toss, Walker sent his men first to the bat. Out upon the field trotted the Rockspur men, wearing, with a single exception, the new gray uniforms. That exception was the tall lad who walked down into the pitcher's box, at sight of whom there was great confusion and astonishment among the spectators.

It was John Smith, who was wearing his old academy suit, having found no gray uniform to fit him. His face was very pale, and he felt a queer shaking sensation at the pit of the stomach.

A shout went up from the crowd:

"Is that your new pitcher? Give us back our money!"

"It's a bunco game," declared Leon Bentley, mingling with the astonished and dissatisfied throng. "Highland will pound him to death within three innings. Mark what I say."

The Highland players were astonished, and they chuckled to themselves, assuring each other that they had a snap. Ned Morse seized a bat and advanced to the plate.

John received the ball from the umpire, but it dropped from his nerveless hands. He realized that the eyes of that great crowd were on him, and the knowledge overwhelmed him with self-consciousness. He picked up the ball, but felt like throwing it far over the fence and running from the ball-ground.

Dick Sterndale, to tell the truth, was anxious about John. True, the tall lad had fooled his former companions on the occasion when he pitched for Lobsterville, but even Dick did not feel satisfied that John could do that with the Highland players.

Everything was ready; Morse was waiting. After a final moment of hesitation, John pitched the first ball.

The crack that followed told that Morse had hit it fairly. Away it flew far down into the left field, and, although Dennis Murphy ran as if his life depended on it, he was unable to get under the fly, which proved to be a two-bagger for the first Highland striker.

"Whoop-pee!" cried Stubby Fisher, from the coaching-line near first. "It's a snap! Oh, my! oh, me! How tired we'll get running round the bases!"

"I'm sorry for you, Smith," again declared Lee Walker, who was on the line near third. "You ought to know better."

Then, as Garrison reached the plate and Sterndale came down under the bat, having adjusted the cage, both coaches "opened up," their running fire of talk intended to rattle the pitcher quite as much as to direct the base-runner.

Garrison hit the second ball pitched, but lifted it high into the air, giving Renwood a chance to get under it and

hold it. Davis came up and fouled to Rob Linton, who captured it, although Walker danced about on the coach-line in a false pretense of getting out of the way. Hud Dow lifted out far into left field, but Dennis was able to get beneath it and hold it, which retired the visitors without a score, in spite of their having started off in such a dashing manner.

"But look how they hit him!" said Leon Bentley. "Why, they'll murder that lanky chump before the game is over!"

On the bleachers two girls had been greatly relieved by the result, for they had trembled when the Highland man started the game with his long hit.

"Isn't that lovely?" cried Agnes Mayfair, as Dennis caught the fly which put the third man out.

"It's a wonder!" declared Dora Deland, who had been holding her breath. "I thought they were bound to get some scores."

"I was afraid of it," confessed the dark-eyed girl; "but they didn't."

"They will, though," asserted her companion. "John Smith can't pitch against those fellows. It's no use for him to try."

"Wait. You don't know."

"But I know every man hit the ball. It was nothing but luck that they batted it so they were put out."

"I'm sure John can pitch," said the confident Agnes. "Don't decide against him so quick, Dode."

Dora was not the only one who was filled with doubts. Although glad that Highland had not scored, many of the Rockspur players looked anxious as they came in to the bench.

Rockspur was given little time at the bench, for the first three strikers fell victims to Mike Herrick's curves, not one getting safely to first.

Dick gave John a few words of encouragement, and the home team again took the field, with Smith in the box.

John, having gained control of himself in a measure, surprised the majority of the spectators by striking out the first batter on the second inning. Walker came next, however, and got a

hit. He tried to steal second, but Sterndale's quick short-arm throw caught him sliding, and two men were out.

Zack Johnson got a safe one, but John fooled Stubby Fisher, who was playing right field for Highland, and again the visitors were whitewashed.

Now Dennis Murphy headed the list, and he drove a "whistler" far into the field, so that he made it a three-bagger by hard running.

"Here's where we score!" shouted Sterndale; but he was mistaken.

Herrick seemed aroused by Murphy's hit, and fanned Chatterton and Mayfair in short order. Then Renwood put up an easy one, which Joe Davis gathered in, and the second inning terminated without a score for either side.

The Highland pitcher led off at bat this time. John started with an in shoot. Herrick pretended to try to dodge it, but he twisted his body about so it struck him glancingly; and then, after simulating he was badly hurt, slowly jogged down to first, grinning at the Rockspur pitcher.

Somehow that seemed to disturb John, who put the next one right over for Morse, and Ned got a safe hit. Herrick tried to steal third on a ball dropped by Sterndale, but was thrown out. Garrison got a hit a moment later, and there were two men on the bases. The coaches piped up in earnest, and John grew nervous. Sterndale tried to steady him down, but Davis obtained a scratch hit, which sent Morse sprinting home, making the rubber on a slide, and gaining the first score for Highland.

The Highland cheer rang out, and the excitement grew as Dow hit hard to Scott, who was unable to handle the ball in time to put out a man.

The bases were filled.

The coaches yelled and danced, the Highland crowd cheered wildly, the Rockspur spectators were silent and anxious, and John Smith felt that the critical moment of the game had come. Once again he experienced that strange sickening shaking at the pit of his

stomach, making him weak and unsteady at the very moment when he knew he needed all his coolness and nerve to pull him safely through the ordeal, and he tried to get himself well in hand before he delivered another ball.

"Pitch the ball!" screamed the coaches.

"Pitch the ball!" roared the Highland crowd.

Sterndale walked down over the rubber plate, motioning to John, who advanced, feeling a sudden great fear that he was to be taken out of the box. But Dick had no idea of taking John out then. He quietly said:

"Keep cool, old man. Take your time. Don't mind their yelling, but mind my signals. You're all right."

"I'll do my best," said John huskily.

Then they returned to their positions, and the next batter lined out the very first ball John threw, bringing in Garrison and Davis, and landing Dow on third.

Now, of a sudden, a cry rose from the Rockspur bleachers:

"Take him out!"

Knowing they meant him, John's face turned white. For long weeks he had looked forward to this as the hour of his greatest triumph, when he would show both his enemies and friends what sort of mettle there was in him; but now, face to face with his opportunity, it began to appear that he was not equal to the occasion, and the specter of failure rose grim and appalling before him, chilling his shaking soul.

"Take him out! Take him out!" roared the crowd.

CHAPTER XXXII.

WHILE THE CROWD SHOUTED.

He had recognized the voice of the one who first uttered the cry, and he knew that, his heart gnawed by anger because another had supplanted him, Leon Bentley was seeking to arouse the indignation of the crowd.

The ball being returned to him, John paused a moment with it in his hand,

apparently appalled by the fierce shouting from the Rockspur bleachers, while Dow did a wild dance of delight near third base.

That dance cost Dow dear, for, with a sudden, quick movement, John threw sharply to Linton, and the Highland runner was out in a twinkling, having been caught off the bag.

There was a sudden lull in the roaring of the crowd, and, at this juncture, Dick Sterndale was heard to cry:

"That's the stuff, Smith, old man! You caught him handsomely! You're all right, my boy!"

Dick said this as if his confidence in John's ability had not been shaken in the least by what had happened, and that was enough to silence the howling of the dissatisfied ones.

Lee Walker sharply reprimanded Dow for being caught in such a way, and then took position to strike, his manner indicating his firm conviction that he would speedily get a hit.

It was then that John Smith saw for the first time Dora Deland and Agnes Mayfair together on the bleachers, both of them looking straight toward him, one's expression being that of doubt and dread, while the eyes of the other spoke the appeal her lips did not utter.

Scores of times he had longed for the opportunity that now was his to show Dora how completely and shamefully she had misjudged and underestimated him, and, the opportunity having come, it seemed that he was not master of it or himself. If he failed then, he believed he would never again dare look any one in the face, least of all Dora Deland.

Were all his hopes and dreams to come to naught? Had all his practise and patient labor been in vain?

Then he saw another face in the great throng of spectators. Powers was there, having obtained permission to leave his labor for half a day in order to witness the work of his pupil in the box for Rockspur. Somewhat to John's surprise, the old pitcher did not look discouraged and disgusted; but there was calm encouragement in his

face that did much to steady the nerves and cool the blood of the boy.

"I will not fail!"

John had learned the lesson of determination, and now he brought all his power of will to his command, setting his teeth and squaring his jaw, while he cast now and then a glance toward first base, to make sure Hartford was not securing too much of a lead.

Sterndale signaled, but John shook his head till he was satisfied, and then he gave Walker a sharp drop, which Lee went after and missed by several inches. Immediately following this, John tried a rise, being pleased to see Walker fan again, while he heard words of approval and encouragement from Captain Dick. Then he attempted to lure Walker to swing at a wide out curve, but the Highland captain let it pass, smiling in a knowing manner.

Now all the talk of the coaches and the shouting of the Highland crowd failed to disturb John in the least. The shaking, unsteady sensation had passed from him, and, with its passing, confidence had returned, till he had perfect command of himself. He gave Walker another sharp drop, and the Highland captain nearly broke his back striking the empty air.

"Batter out! side out!" came from the umpire; but Highland had made four hits and three scores that inning.

Dick Sterndale tried to encourage his men, for it was a glum-looking set of fellows who came in to the bench. Somebody in the crowd behind asked Dick why he didn't give Bentley a show, but he paid no attention to this.

Jotham Sprout stood up to strike in a hopeless way, being an easy out, as he rolled a little grounder to Herrick, who snapped it over to first. Sterndale gave Bubble a rebuke for his lack of heart, but Jotham seemed to think it was useless to try to hit Herrick's pitching.

John came next, and, with his teeth still set, he drove out a grounder between short and third, making second on the hit by a great run and a beautiful slide.

Then Sterndale and Dennis Murphy

began coaching from the lines, only to see Linton retired on a fly, while Scott struck out.

With the score three to nothing in favor of Highland, John went into the box again, unmindful of the hoots of the crowd; and the very confidence of the Highlanders enabled him to make them easy victims. He struck out Johnson and Fisher in short order, to find himself facing Herrick once more.

"I wouldn't let such a farmer as you strike me out for a thousand dollars," declared the Highland pitcher.

John smiled a strange, grim smile, and then proceeded to fool Herrick with three pitched balls, two of which were drops. Having struck at the first two, Herrick saw John throw the third one, as he fancied, in exactly the same manner, and, expecting a drop, he held back. It was a straight one over the heart of the plate, the umpire declaring it the third strike.

The Highland pitcher dropped his bat in disgust, while the Rockspur crowd shouted with delight, chaffing him unmercifully.

Herrick was in an angry mood, and Rockspur came near scoring in their half of the inning, but luck was against them, the third man being put out at the plate.

"Now," said Leon Bentley, as John again entered the box, "you'll see Jonah go to pieces again."

"Young feller," said Powers, who happened to overhear this remark, "I'll bet ye two to one they don't git a hit off him."

Mart was right, for again John retired Highland without a hit; but, most unfortunately, Herrick was able to return the compliment.

John was on his mettle now, and the sixth inning resulted in a whitewash for both sides. Highland, however, had obtained three scores, while Rockspur had not secured one, and the time for getting them was drawing toward a close.

In the seventh, through a combination of errors and poor judgment, Highland filled the bases, and the visitors were confident that they would

make several more scores. Then, with the heavy end of the batting-list against him, John settled down to business, putting out three men, one on strikes and two on infield flies.

Herrick showed his disgust again, for he had counted on more scores. He pretended to disdain the Rockspur pitcher, who was the first striker, and John once more drove out a beauty for two bags. Linton tried hard to get in a safe one, but was thrown out at first.

John resolved to take a desperate chance, getting a good lead toward third, for which he made a mad try on a pitched ball, running as if his life depended on it, and ending with a slide.

It was a close decision, but the umpire declared that he was safe.

Scott lifted a fly to center field, and John held his base, crouching ready to run as he watched the ball. On the instant the ball touched the hands of the center-fielder, John leaped away from third and went tearing toward the plate, bringing the entire crowd up standing to witness the result.

The fielder threw, but he did not get the exact line of the plate, which saved John, who slid under the Highland catcher and brought in the first score for Rockspur.

Then they cheered him, it being somewhat surprising to observe how the sentiment of the crowd had changed toward him. The ones who had been shouting for him to be taken out now yelled that he was all right, and one loud-voiced fellow howled that he was the only real good man on the team.

Sterndale tried hard to keep the ball rolling, but he did not get to first in time, and the seventh inning closed with Highland two scores in the lead.

The Highlanders were exasperated by John's success in deceiving them, having been unable to make a showing against him since the eventful third inning, and their exasperation increased when once more they failed to get a man past second.

In the eighth, Dennis Murphy led off for Rockspur, getting first on balls, and stealing second. Chatterton went out

on a foul fly, but Mayfair got a long, clean single to right field, and the Irish lad came racing home with another score for Rockspur.

Now a single score was needed to tie Highland, and the excitement was intense. Herrick was scowling blackly, for Smith's success had put him in a bad temper, and, in trying to hold Mayfair close to first, he threw wild to Walker, letting Walter scud down to second.

"Here's where we do it, fellows!" Sterndale said, in his encouraging way. "A good, clean hit brings Mayfair home and ties the game."

But Renwood had not been hitting, and, seeing Herrick was so angry that he had lost his control, Dolph waited patiently, being rewarded by getting his base on balls.

"Oh, for a homer!" muttered Scott.

"Mum-mum-mum-might as well wish fuf-fuf-for the end of the world," said Danny Chatterton, as Jotham Sprout came up to the plate.

Jotham struck at three balls and missed them all, whereupon he was so disgusted that he threw the bat straight up in the air, and, coming down, it hit him fairly on his head, causing him to utter a howl of pain and astonishment.

It was Smith's turn next, and Sterndale whispered to him:

"Can't you put it over the fence, old man, the way you did for Highland when you played against us?"

"I can try," was the grim answer.

Two men were out, and the men on bases were instructed to run on any kind of a hit. Herrick seemed to settle down, and he sent the balls over like bullets out of a gun. Two strikes and two balls were called on the batter, and then John met the ball fairly, lining it out with all his strength.

"It's over the fence!" was the cry, as the runners sped around the diamond.

It did seem that the ball was going over the fence, but it struck the top board and bounded back into the diamond, which stopped John on second.

But both Mayfair and Renwood had

crossed the rubber, and Rockspur had taken the lead by one score.

Then the spectators on the Rockspur bleachers and in the grand stand seemed to go mad with enthusiasm and joy. Hands, hats, handkerchiefs, and flags waved, horns tooted, men shouted, and women screamed. Looking up across the diamond from his position on second, John, realizing he had caused this wild demonstration, felt his heart swell within him and his nerves tingle with a keen delight that was like sharp, sweet pain. By self-command, grim determination, and resolution to conquer and control his weakness, he had brought this about, and there was little danger that in after life he would forget the lesson thus learned.

On the bleachers the academy scholars had gathered in a body, and now they sent forth the Rockspur yell, with thundering, hissing, booming explosiveness:

Boo, bum, burr! Rick, rock, spur!
Rockspur—s-s-s-s! Rockspur—boom!
Rockspur!

It was several minutes before the demonstration subsided, and then somebody started it again by shrieking:

"What's the matter with Smith?"

It seemed that every person in that great crowd rose up and roared back that Smith was all right, and in the midst of the throng John saw Dora Deland and Agnes Mayfair waving the blue-and-white colors and cheering with the rest. Despite himself, his eyes filled with a mist of joy, for he knew now that his days of humiliation and shame had passed and he was an outcast no longer.

Standing on the coaching-line near first, with his hands on his hips, Dick Sterndale was laughing, and, as soon as he could make himself heard, he cried:

"We've got 'em, boys' Smith has won his own game, and I'll bet my life on it!"

This caused another outburst, which quickly subsided, as the next batter came to the plate.

In the midst of the Rockspur spec-

tators one person was pale with rage and disappointment, that one being Leon Bentley, who still continued to insist that Highland would win the game, which was not yet over.

Rob Linton did his best to bring Smith home, but his long fly was caught, and the inning was over.

"Now, fellows," said Lee Walker, as the Highlanders came in from the field, "we must jump onto Smith and win the game right here. We can do it."

Dow came up and struck out, whereupon the Rockspur spectators shouted. Then Hartford fell an easy victim to the skill of the tall lad in the box, not even touching the ball for a foul tip, and the spectators shouted still louder.

There was a sudden hush as Walker, his eyes gleaming and nostrils dilated, stepped up to the rubber. The deciding moment of the game had come, and the crowd seemed scarcely to breathe. John's first ball cut the air like a whizzing arrow, landing with a familiar "plunk" in Sterndale's mitt.

"One strike!" rang out the cool, clear voice of the umpire.

Walker gripped the bat, while his companions looked on in helpless, almost hopeless anxiety.

John took plenty of time, but he "made 'em whistle" when he threw. The Highland men afterward declared they had never before seen such speed. The pitcher was keyed to the top notch, and again Walker failed in an attempt to make a hit.

"Two strikes!" decided the umpire.

Sterndale laughed as he returned the ball to John, crying to the crowd:

"It's all over! They could hit a Mauser bullet easier than they could touch that ball!"

But Walker made a final despairing try, only to realize at the last instant that Smith had deceived him with a drop. Three men in succession had John Smith struck out in the last inning, and the game was won by Rockspur, the complete score being four to three. The decision of the umpire on Walker's last strike was not heard, for

the roaring crowd came pouring down from the bleachers on to the diamond, making a rush for the hero of the day. But several members of the ball-team reached John first, and they caught him up, lifting him on their shoulders. Sterndale was one of them, and Rob Linton, John's former enemy, was another. The crowd cheered wildly, and the fellows bearing John aloft marched around the diamond, shouting and singing.

In vain John begged them to let him down, his face flushed with modest confusion, while he laughed to keep back the tears of delight. The academy scholars gathered thick about him, waving the flags and colors, while they shouted till they were hoarse.

Martin Powers, having forced a way through the crowd, grasped John's hand when at last the boy was lowered to the ground.

"I knew ye had it in ye," he declared. "All ye needed was the chance to let it come out."

"Hurroo!" croaked Dennis Murphy, hoarse from shouting. "Ixchoose me! Oi believe me voice is cracked."

"Smith," said Sterndale, holding John's hand with both of his, "you've made your record to-day, and it is one to be proud of, old man. You're a dandy!"

John could not escape till they were willing to let him go. Then he saw two girls waiting to speak to him, and Dora Deland was the first to rush forward.

"I'm awfully glad," she laughingly declared. "Oh, Mr. Smith! I believe you're the greatest pitcher in the world!"

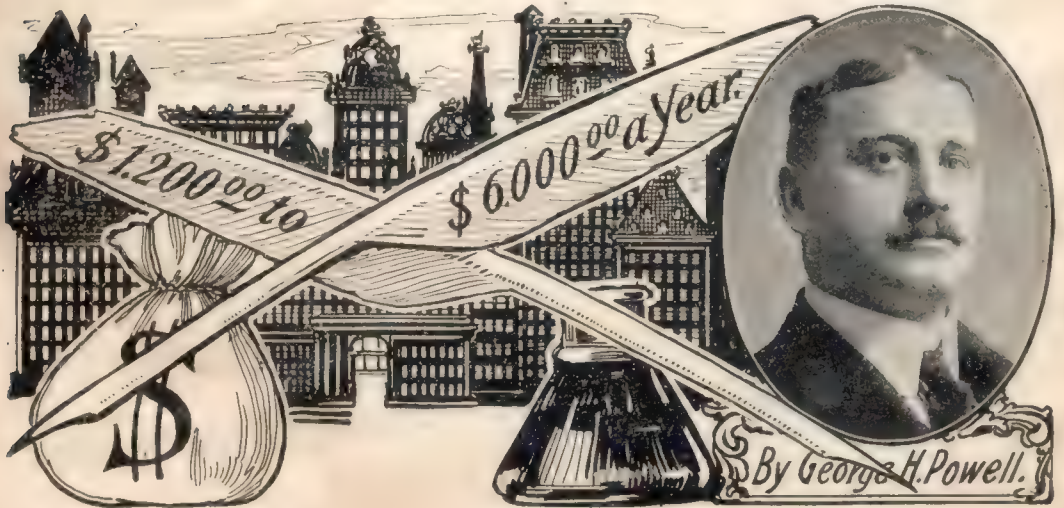
"Thank you," came quietly from the tall youth. "I'm hardly that."

Then he turned from Dora to Agnes, who pressed his hand and murmured:

"Oh, it was splendid!"

He gave her little hand a warm pressure in return, Dora being forgotten; and, with the westering sun lighting their happy faces, they walked down Academy Hill together.

Money-Making Openings In Advertising



Greater Income Facts For Ambitious Young Men and Women of America

NO story can hold the interest that attaches to the plain, every-day recital dealing with the increased prosperity and success of our ambitious young men and women.

For this reason the great opportunities in the advertising field, the wonderful prospects of the future, and the rapid advancement of those who have doubled their former salaries many times after becoming proficient through spare-time study and practice, must prove highly interesting and inspiring to those who are determined to take advantage of the times and conditions.

This is the age of advertising, but so imperfectly is it understood to-day that out of a billion or more dollars spent on it, yet conservative estimates place the loss through poor ads and bad judgment at fully thirty per cent!

No wonder the business world is calling for properly trained young men and women to take charge of this most important branch of modern commercial life.

Enormous Growth of Advertising.

The constant increase of advertising space in

American publications is astonishing, even to this great, big, pushing Nation. Three or four years ago it was considered wonderful that several new magazines had succeeded in gaining footholds, but in 1906 we find almost twice as many as existed in 1903! And several new ones are about ready to be sprung upon the public, notably the Harmsworth American Editions of British magazines.

It is enough to make one rub his eyes and wonder if it is all real. Surely the American people have become omnivorous readers. With the grandest era of money-making and business expansion ever known since the world began, it need cause no wonderment that advertising has become such a vital part of the business machine.

Briefly, even the mighty betterment of the past few years will seem amateurish as a whole in comparison with the work of the developed ad writers of two or three years hence.

To-day the energetic young man or woman who is now obliged to grind out a clerical or subordinate career—nerve-racking and uncongenial—at from seven to twelve dollars a week, has the opportunities of a life.



A Million Dollar Business

Canajoharie, N. Y., August 1, 1906.

My dear Mr. Powell:—
The word "busy" is no misnomer in connection with my work this summer. Yet I am never too busy to tell my friends of the practical value of **THE POWELL SYSTEM OF ADVERTISING INSTRUCTION**. You have spared no pains to explain in detail every step in my course of study—you have shown such a personal interest in my advancement that I take this opportunity to express my appreciation of your kindness. Through the knowledge gained under your instruction I was able to take up the "BEECH-NUT" proposition, and develop it to its present proportion. With best wishes for your continued success, believe me,

Very sincerely yours, A. E. HODGE, Adv. Mgr.

Old manufacturers and retailers who are daily waking up to the possibilities of good advertising, are loudly calling for trained brains; while young and husky concerns seem to understand instinctively that real, crackerjack advertising is the surest weapon to employ in breaking into the "established businesses" of

old concerns, and in creating new demands.

Why Advertising Instruction is Better Than a Legacy.

Scores of young men and women, brimful of tingling, red-blood ambition, are unable to devote more than a spare hour or two daily, and the value of a practical course of correspondence instruction like the Powell System is almost beyond estimate.

Scores of former Powell students now in big positions declare that they wouldn't exchange what I taught them for a \$5,000.00 legacy, because I have made it possible for them to earn in extra salaries and incomes from fifty to a hundred per cent more than the legacy would draw in bank interest.

This means much to every ambitious person who is anxious to make his or her educational expense a big dividend payer.

Why the Powell System is the Only One Endorsed by the Editors of Advertising Publications.

Out of more than twenty ad schools the Powell System is the practical "survival of the fittest." True, one or two alleged competitors remain, but with the magnificent support given me by the advertising authorities of America, coupled with the exclusive endorsement of the leading advertising journals, it is not strange that more than one prominent expert has said to me: "I don't see, Powell, how the other teachers get a single student with the reputation you enjoy."

And they might have gone further by adding that practically *all* the big advertising positions are filled with Powell graduates, and that advertising agents advertise for "Powell graduates only."

There must be an unmistakable reason for this unity of opinion in my favor—and it is deserved.

The Powell System is entirely different from any other. It gives actual, practical experience instead of mere theory and lecture. It is the product of my long and admittedly successful career, and is far more practical than the old personal-contact plan, which wastes both time and thought.

The Powell System never could have received the exclusive endorsement and recommendation of Printer's Ink, Ad Sense, Advertising World, Western World—the journal



Mr. B. E. Orr, Madison Lake, Minn., writes, Sept. 6, 1906: "In reference to the Powell System completed last May, I desire to say that the training I received was of the practical kind, and it has been of great value to me as a department store advertising manager. And to it is due the credit for the success of articles written for trade papers on advertising, so highly commended by ad experts." This briefly shows that I develop scientific, capable men and women.

From Humble Rubber Worker to Two Fine Positions —and Quickly

Mr. Geo. H. Libby's success was noted in my September ads, and after becoming advertising manager of the F. D. Fuller Real Estate Co., his work attracted such attention that Steele & Smith, Birmingham, Ala., the largest department store in the state, engaged him at a temptingly higher salary. Mr. Libby is proud of his double success and wants me to let others know about it. He adds: "Nothing in the world but your training and my nightly endeavors, aside from my regular duties, could have qualified me for such responsibility. I can truthfully say that the Powell System is without a parallel."



of mail advertising, the editor being a former Powell student—and the personal endorsement of hundreds of publishers all over America, unless my superior work entitled me to thus be accorded first place.

How Representative Authorities View the Powell System.

Former Powell students and representative business men from Maine to California are constantly sending me new students through their recommendations.

Probably this kind of endorsement is beyond anything ever known in the history of correspondence instruction, and it is due to the fact that I have done so much for my students that they spare neither time nor labor in setting others right. My files are filled with such letters as these:

Mr. Charles J. Casey, a Powell graduate of New York and an established advertising specialist, wrote Robt. H. Nicoll, Ogdensburg, N. Y., as follows:

"You have taken a wise step to success. Mr. Powell actually does more than he promises. The other so-called schools of instruction are unworthy of comparison. Advertising is a most dignified and profitable business, and good ad writers are scarce. Mr. Powell put me in touch with several \$35.00 positions when through."

Mr. H. W. Keeney, advertising manager of the Republican, Findlay, O., a former Powell student, writes: "I have just received and answered an inquiry from Mr. Alan B. Carmack, 810 Keystone Bank Building, Pittsburg, Pa., relative to a course in advertising. And rest assured I said the *right* thing about the Powell System."

Mr. A. Jacobson of the Arthur Hardwood Flooring Co., Chicago, Ill., wrote Mr. O. N. McCool, Memphis, Tenn., as follows: "After looking into the various courses very thoroughly, I really could not see anything for me but the Powell System, and to say that my expectations were realized is putting it very mildly. The lessons are *cram full* of ideas and come in such compact form that it is a pleasure to look them over, and a greater pleasure to work on them. For quick and good results, I

sincerely recommend the Powell System as the best."

Mr. E. F. Gardner, Editor of the Western Monthly, the famous mail order advertising journal, Kansas City, Mo., writes Mr. L. R. Fisher, Kenosha, Wis., as follows: "Replying to your favor of August 21st, 1906, in which you ask for information regarding the most capable advertising instructor, I would say that in my opinion Mr. George H. Powell stands *head and shoulders above any other man in this field*. I took Mr. Powell's course about six years ago and consider it the best business investment I ever made in my life."

Mr. C. M. Gilbert, Jr., Assistant Advertising Manager for W. M. Ostrander, the famous real estate promoter of Philadelphia, Pa., replying to an inquiry regarding my course, stated that though he did not know

me personally, that he was much interested in my style of advertising and kept my advertisements in a scrapbook for models of style.

Mr. C. C. Greene, Advertising Manager of the famous Orinne Co., Washington, D. C., through my instruction advanced from a drug clerk at a very nominal salary to his present high position. He recently wrote Mr. Otto Fansel, Louisville, Ky., as follows: "I can heartily recommend the Powell Course to you. When I began it, I was earning the 'immense' salary of \$5.00 per week. As I progressed in the course, I did likewise



Mr. Fred M. Weller, Barberton, O., wanted advertising skill, and enrolled during the past year for the Powell System. His progress was so rapid that he quickly began to earn money writing advertising matter for various houses, and when through with my course he was able to give up his old job, to accept a larger salary and a generous per cent. on all new business. This is simply a repetition of Powell successes everywhere. Mr. Weller adds: "Under your instruction I could not help but see the many solid things. The Powell System is certainly IT"

Became Adv. Manager in Four Months

Hamilton, Ont., July 4th, 1906.
Dear Mr. Powell:—

It seems scarcely credible that four months ago I knew nothing of advertising and in that short time you have fitted me to successfully fill the position I now occupy as Advertising Manager for Hamilton's leading department store. Your course has certainly worked wonders. It has doubled my salary, as well as put me

DEPARTMENT STORE



Hamilton's Largest Dept. Store.

In a far more congenial position than I formerly held as dress goods salesman. I wouldn't be without the knowledge gained for hundreds of dollars. If every young man in the country could know just how the course has advanced me, you would be flooded with applications for enrollment.

With best wishes, I am,

Very truly yours,
ERNEST NEWKIRK, Adv. Mgr.

in the salary line, becoming of more and more value to my employers. I am now in a position where I can handle an advertising appropriation of nearly \$100,000 a year. Since making good with this company, I have refused several flattering offers from other concerns—one big offer through the courtesy of Mr. Powell. It will hardly be necessary for me to say more in praise of the Powell System." Mr. A. Eugene Smith, Cleveland, O., who secured a \$6,000 position as advertisement writer upon completion of my course of instruction, wrote in reply to an inquiry from Mrs. J. H. Emerson, Rochester, N. Y.: "The course is simply fine, very thorough, interesting, and instructive. I have investigated all other courses in advertisement writing, and know that you can depend upon what Mr. Powell says. If you have your own way to make, by all means start now."



Mr. Fred D. Stevens, 217 W 42nd St., New York, just made Advertising Manager of a large corporation, says "Before enrolling I investigated all other correspondence schools of advertising then in the field, and I decided in your favor. I consider the Powell System the best. You do all you claim to do, and are very painstaking. Soon after graduation I secured a position with the Economy Service Co., which I have satisfactorily held. Have just accepted a very lucrative position as Advertising Manager for a new corporation—name later."

land, O., who secured a \$6,000 position as advertisement writer upon completion of my course of instruction, wrote in reply to an inquiry from Mrs. J. H. Emerson, Rochester, N. Y.: "The course is simply fine, very thorough, interesting, and instructive. I have investigated all other courses in advertisement writing, and know that you can depend upon what Mr. Powell says. If you have your own way to make, by all means start now."

Mr. A. J. Dunning, Jr., President of the Critic Publishing Co., Franklin, Va., recently wrote to Mr. C. G. Lawson, Staffordshire, Indiana:

"In my opinion, Mr. Powell is the man to instruct you, as he is probably the foremost authority in the United States. His course not only placed me in a position to realize cash by writing advertisements, but broadened my general knowledge, and if I were never to write another advertisement, I would feel repaid for the expense of the course."

Practical Work the Secret.

Among the many reasons why the Powell System is far superior to all other methods designed to teach advertising, is the fact that I give live, actual advertising to lay out and prepare, on exactly the same basis as I would were the student in my employ. Other methods are principally arranged on the "lecture and answer" plan. The Powell System requires the highest possible skill in conducting the lessons—the other plan can easily be managed by "Examiners" at \$6 to \$10 weekly. As John W. Hitesman, Grand Rapids, Mich., says: "I met a physician and criticised his ads, and when I left him he was making excuses! Five months study in the Powell System vs. twenty years experience."

Three Times the Demand.

The ambitious person has but to note the successes of the Powell graduates herewith illustrated to realize that the opportunities are everywhere. All lines seek the trained ad writer as never before, and there is no vocation to compare with advertising.

Readers of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE who want to earn from \$1,200.00 to \$6,000.00 a year, and business men who want to double profits, will be highly interested in my *two free books*—my beautiful new Prospectus and "Net Results," filled to the brim with facts and successes.

For the free copies merely address me

George H. Powell, 225 Metropolitan Annex, New York

CHRISTMAS DIAMONDS

ON CHARGE ACCOUNT

THE ARTICLES PICTURED HERE ARE A FEW

Choice Selections from our Christmas Catalog

Mountings are 14 kt. Solid Gold. Articles are Exact Size of Illustrations

- | | | |
|------|--|----------|
| 50. | Diamond set, Gold Filled, 7 Jeweled, Elgin Watch. | \$ 20.00 |
| 50½. | Same with 15 Jeweled, Elgin Movement. | 25.00 |
| 51. | Belcher Mounting, Diamond EarScrews. Per pair | 40.00 |
| 52. | Oval Cluster Ring, Opal Center, 12 Diamonds | 100.00 |
| 53. | Tiffany Belcher, Solitaire Diamond Ring | 95.00 |
| 54. | Open Shank, Cup Belcher Setting, Diamond Ring | 45.00 |
| 55. | Satin Finish Locket, Diamond in Cut Star. | 22.50 |
| 56. | Princess Ring, 5 Rubies or Emeralds, 26 Diamonds | 100.00 |
| 57. | Marquise Ring, 5 Turquoise, 18 Rose Cut Diamonds | 20.00 |
| 58. | Round Cluster Ring, Turquoise Center, 14 Diam'ds | 60.00 |
| 59. | Harvest Moon Brooch, 11 Diamonds | 125.00 |
| 60. | Ear Screws, Turquoise Center, 12 Diam'ds. Per p'r. | 60.00 |
| 61. | Satin Finish, Heart Locket, One Diamond | 27.50 |
| 62. | Solitaire Diamond Shirt Stud. | 60.00 |
| 63. | Crown Setting, Solitaire Diam'd EarScrews. Fair | 100.00 |
| 64. | 14 kt. Solid Gold, 7 Jeweled Elgin Watch. | 80.00 |
| 64½. | Same, with 15 Jeweled Elgin Movement. | 85.00 |
| 65. | Wire Mounting, Solitaire Diamond Ring | 60.00 |
| 66. | Sun Burst Brooch, Diamond in Cup Setting | 40.00 |
| 67. | Solitaire Diamond Shirt Stud. | 140.00 |
| 68. | Tiffany Mounting, Solitaire Diamond Ring | 85.00 |
| 69. | Scroll Brooch, 7 Diamonds in Cup Settings. | 60.00 |
| 70. | Hoop Ring, Two Diamonds, One Ruby or Emerald | 50.00 |
| 70½. | Same, with Three Diamonds | 75.00 |
| 71. | Roman or Plain Finish Cuff Buttons. Per pair. | 20.00 |
| 72. | Bear Claws, Ladies Ring, Solitaire Diamond | 85.00 |
| 73. | Tiffany Hoop Ring, 5 Diamonds | 90.00 |
| 74. | Grooved or Plain Tiffany, Solitaire Diam'd Ring | 175.00 |
| 75. | High Set, Fancy Eng'v'd, Solitaire Diam'd Ring | 25.00 |
| 76. | Engraved, High Set, Solitaire Diamond Ring | 70.00 |
| 77. | Diagonal Tiffany Ring, Two Diamonds | 45.00 |
| 78. | Flat Band, High Set, Solitaire Diamond Ring | 17.50 |

FOR WIFE OR SWEETHEART

Sister, Mother or Daughter a Diamond is THE gift of all gifts—a Royal present for Queen of Home and Heart. You can obtain the Diamond at once, by THE WALKER-EDMUND Open Account Plan, paying only a small amount each month.

How it is done: Choose one or several articles from this Jewelry Book, sent free to any address. Write us your choice, and they will promptly be in your possession for your careful and leisurely examination. We bear all the expense and risk. If they please in every way, however, pay us in a manner to best suit your convenience—say one-fifth on acceptance, the balance in eight or ten equal monthly amounts. We allow 10% off for cash.

We guarantee satisfaction. If, after the diamond has been worn ten days, it does not suit perfectly, send it back and get your money in full. Every transaction is absolutely confidential.

Our Diamonds are the Purest Crystal White, the kind delights in presenting or wearing, and which rapidly increase in value. We furnish the strongest guarantee, and we save you 20% by selling direct at importer's prices.

For instant delivery, make your selection from this page. On

WRITE TODAY FOR FREE CHRISTMAS JEWELRY BOOK No. 8

The most beautiful Jewelry Catalogue issued, showing hundreds of exclusive and dainty designs in rings, watches, brooches, chains, lockets, etc.

Do your christmas shopping in the privacy of your own home. Make this the happiest holiday in the loved one's experience by the gift of a Diamond or Watch. **WRITE NOW.**

THE WALKER-EDMUND COMPANY

DIAMOND IMPORTERS AND MANUFACTURING JEWELERS

W75 State Street, CHICAGO, U. S. A.



SIMPLIFIED SHAVING

Just a Gillette Safety Razor

soap and brush---and in 2 to 5 minutes the harshest beard can be smoothly shaved from the tenderest skin, with greater comfort than you have ever experienced from your pet razor or your favorite barber.

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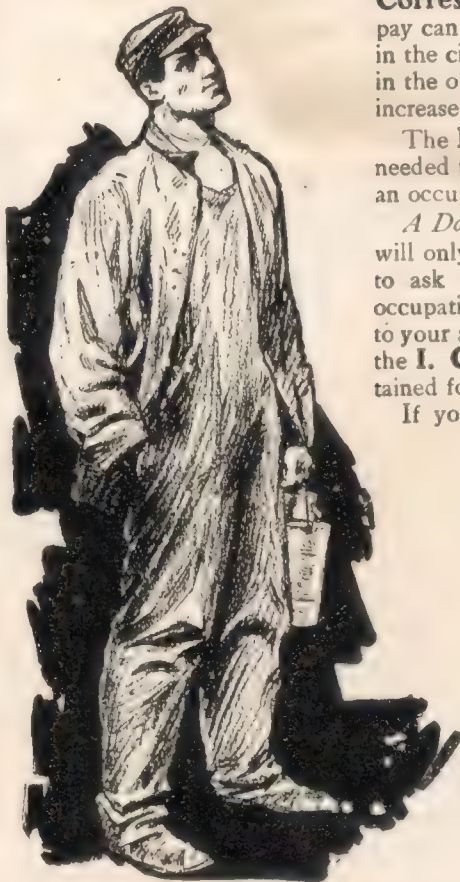
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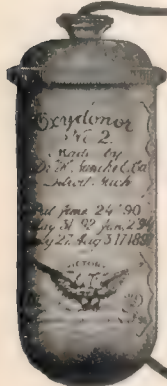
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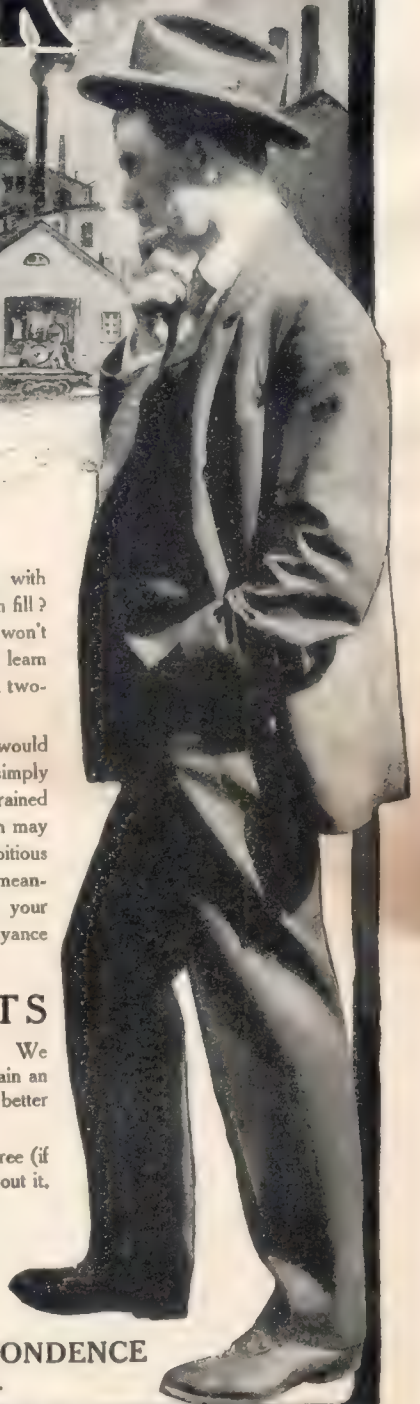
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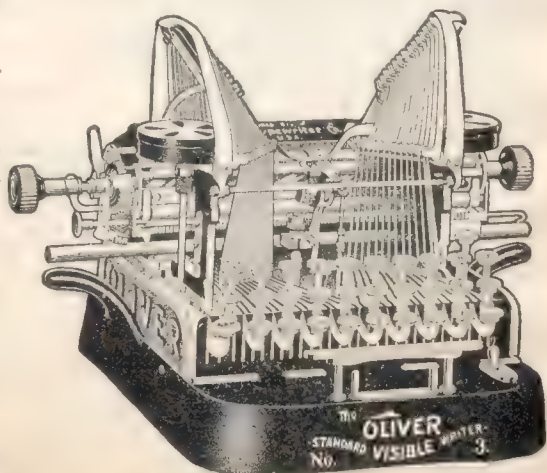
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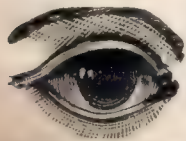
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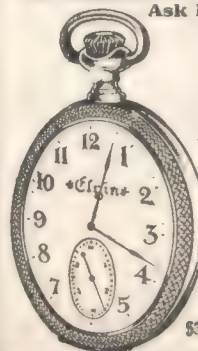
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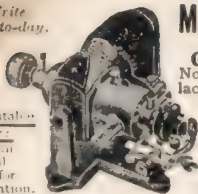
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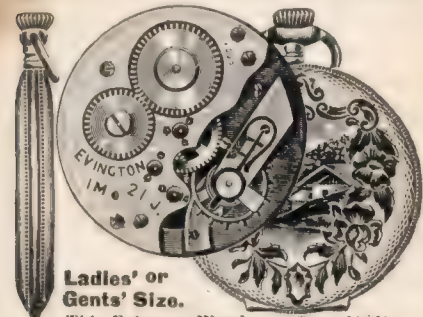
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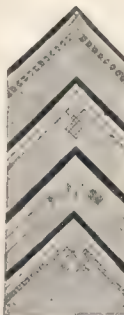
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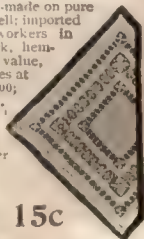


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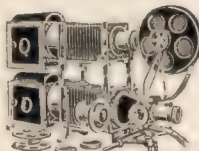


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is represented by a very striking story, entitled "*The Smuggled Ring*," which, as its name suggests, contains an atmosphere of mystery, very skilfully worked out. Mr. Hough is a born and trained story-teller and this, his latest, is an absorbing one.

Mrs. WILSON WOODROW

contributes a story, "*The Step on the Stair*," in which character study is very artistically blended with plot. She has won a place with the best contemporary writers of fiction.

ROY NORTON

will have what we consider the best story he has ever written. "*The Buckskin Shirt*" is a combination of humor, pathos and child interest in a Christmas setting.

E. TEMPLE THURSTON'S

story, "*Altar Wine*," has an absorbing theme handled in a way peculiar to the author of "*The Apple of Eden*."

There will also be distinctly Christmas stories by **OWEN OLIVER**, **MARY B. MULLETT** and **ELIZABETH BANKS**, a new and characteristic story by **JOSEPH C. LINCOLN** and an absorbing mystery story by **MARY IMLAY TAYLOR**.

MARGARET SUTTON BRISCOE will continue her delightful essays on the "*Visions of an Optimist*," and **W. J. HENDERSON**, the distinguished musical critic will have an article on "*The New Musical Season*."

CHRISTMAS SUGGESTIONS FROM THE HOUSE OF LYON

THE Christmas season, with all its good time of gift giving, is nearly here. The old problem, "What to give?" faces you again, and, as a practical help in choosing your gifts, we present a few of the choicest things from our Christmas stock.

If you are going to give, why not give something worth while? What gift like a beautiful diamond or handsome piece of jewelry!

Our terms to all customers are

20% DOWN AND 10% PER MONTH

On all cash orders we allow 10% discount.

Every diamond—every piece of jewelry in our magnificent stock—makes a worthy gift. Every value is exceptional—we urge its comparison with that furnished by your home dealer; if it isn't superior we will take back the article.

We ship subject to examination at our expense. No deposit required in advance. Order by number direct from the illustration, or, to see a larger assortment, send for new Christmas catalog, the most complete ever issued. Ask for catalogue No. 18.

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A GENTLEMAN in the truest meaning of that stately old word does not dress well for display's sake, but for the soothing sense of personal satisfaction which springs from looking and feeling "fit." The fop as a type is fast disappearing, even from urban communities, because the virile spirit of the age regards with contempt a mincing gait, a wasplike waist, and a dandified mien. These are not fashionable, for latter-day fashion is simply applied common sense; and common sense frowns upon every suggestion of effeminacy as discreditable and silly. Americans dress so well, because they dress so simply and make their clothes fit time, occasion, and circumstance. He who goes to business in a frock coat, a top hat, and patent leather shoes is guilty of as great a lapse from the proprieties as his fellow who attends a high noon church wedding in tweeds and russet shoes. Both are clad inappropriately, and, hence, unfashionably. Dressing well, then, means neither more nor less than dressing simply, suitably, and sensibly. It means choosing a color, cut, or cloth primarily because it is becoming

to the individual and not for a fancied style or merely to feel that one is "in it."

The nearness of the holidays, with their accompaniments of blustery winds and nipping frost, suggests suitable clothes for the house, the room, and the bath. No wardrobe is complete without jackets and robes for snuggling up or cuddling down; and these may be as simple or sumptuous as taste and purse dictate. Formerly, house clothes were

cut without any regard to style, and resembled blankets more than anything else. The growing appreciation, however, of the refinements of dress and living has led to house suits and room robes which are designed with all the care and much of the style that a tailor bestows upon a frock coat or an evening suit.

The robes are shaped to the waist, flaring of skirt, and have the same broad, low-lying lapels that are put upon suits for out-of-doors. Many are provided with folded-back cuffs and breast pockets, and the edges and pocket-flaps are braided with silk in a shade to match, or agreeably contrasting with the ground color.



The Approved Evening Muffler.

Order Your Fall Suit From the Wholesale Maker

SEND for samples today and get started now in dealing direct with the wholesale tailor. It's a big advantage, you can hardly realize what a substantial saving you make and what clothes satisfaction it means to you. Just now we are making a specialty of a black, fine, pure, all wool Thibet Suit, at only \$10.00, single and double breasted style, without doubt the greatest value ever offered, materials and workmanship guaranteed absolutely.

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The robe portrayed in the accompanying sketch shows the grace and distinction that may be conferred upon a well-cut garment.



The Fashionable Room Robe.

While the well-bred man seeks to accentuate his personality in the garments that he wears indoors quite as much as in those for out-of-doors, studied elaborateness should be avoided. It hints disagreeably of the pampered sybarite. Still, for lounging a-mornings, breakfasting, shaving, traveling, and in illness, a room or house suit is really indispensable, and affords a grateful relief from the stiff clothes of conventionality. Aside from keeping one's outdoor garments from being mussed, the wearing of smartly cut house clothes fosters neatness and those little niceties of person which denote true refinement. To lend the desired "loungy" air to the indoor costume, a white silk handkerchief is loosely knotted around the neck, and worn in place of a collar. If one likes to express one's individuality by means of a monogram, it may be embroidered upon the breast pocket of the robe or jacket.

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stand the Laundry Test better because details of construction — such as those illustrated — are never slighted though they add greatly to cost of making.

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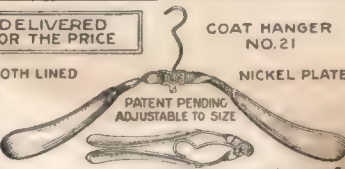
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An Iron-clad Guarantee Sent With Each Garment



Velvet coats have been discarded as too suggestive of the attic dauber to be acceptable to the generality of men. Woolens, cotton fabrics, linens, and silks in deep shades of purple, green, and blue, and made with military fronts, are the favored materials for house clothes.

I show here a modish muffler for winter wear of an evening. It is fashioned of soft white silk, and is folded by the wearer. Made-up shields or protectors are not approved by well-dressed men, as they look stiff and angular, and cannot be adjusted with the desired softness. For wear with evening clothes, either the white or black muffler is correct, white being much preferred. Black is too somber against the background of "inky worsted." The longer and more capacious a muffler is, the better it accords with the fashion of the season.

Quality counts for as much in clothes as it does in anything else. While the cheaper article may look superficially as good as that of higher cost, it does not wear as well, nor keep its style. Pay as much as you can afford, but let every article be fresh and spotless. Buy fewer things if need be, so that what you do buy may be of better quality. Two or three well-cut business suits should suffice for the needs of the every-day man, together with a frock or morning coat for "occasion," and an evening suit for the dance, the dinner, or the play. Economy may well be practised in the number of suits that a man gets; but of collars, ties, shirts, and the like, he cannot have too many. When one analyzes dress, it is seen to be made up of seeming trifles. For example, a tasteful, gracefully knotted tie often redeems indifferently cut clothes; and well-fitting gloves and a becoming hat may do more for a man than the most skilful tailor.

Pay particular heed to the freshness of your linen, as lack of care in this respect condemns one instantly and utterly. The moderate cost at which the accessories of dress are to be had nowadays, and the newness of style and distinction of cut and pattern that are available in even articles of the lowest price, deprive a man of all excuse for not being well, if not noticeably well, dressed.

BEAUNASH.



For years ago I suffered. Indeed the Swoboda System, which has proved to be the ONLY natural and speedy method of attaining perfect development, health and strength. Among my 50 000 pupils are many prominent men and women. Let me send you their endorsement of my system.

Swoboda Give me 10 minutes a day and You Will Gain Health, Strength and Perfect Development.

I MEAN just that, and I will convince you here and now, before I say more, that I can show you nature's own speedy way to perfect health and strength. For I agree that *my instructions shall cost you nothing* if you follow them and fail to gain all I promise. Of course, I could not afford to do this if I could not accomplish all I claim. My system is different from all others. *It is the only system which does not overtax the heart.* I do not offer you drugs nor apparatus. I have no books nor charts to sell. I do not prescribe gymnastics nor strict dieting. I do not ask you to do anything in the least inconvenient or tiresome. I do show you how to live as you live now and do the things you like to do—in the way nature intended you should, so that they bring you benefit instead of harm. I show you how to gain firm flesh if you are too thin—how to reduce your weight if you are too stout—how to fully develop and strengthen any underdeveloped parts of your body—how to gain health if you are ill—how to retain health if you are well.

You cannot achieve real success and happiness—no man can command position and riches—no woman can enjoy the privileges and benefits of her sex—no one can gain the full measure of love, respect, admiration and success, without the foundation of health and strength.

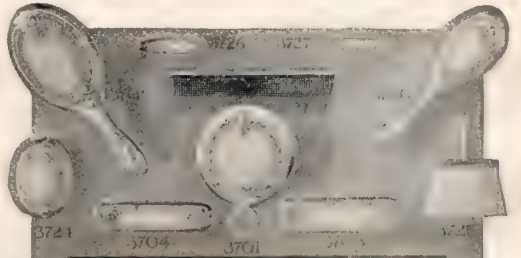
If you are a man, I will show you how to gain the mental and physical force—the personal magnetism—the presence the bearing which commands respect—the clear brain, looking upon the world through clear eyes—the self-confidence and understanding which *compels* success.

If you are a woman, I will show you how to gain the perfect, healthful development, the carriage and poise which brings symmetry and grace, a beautiful complexion and figure—an attractiveness that controls others and draws to you admiration, affection, love.

My New Book is FREE It tells you how I accomplish all I do. Write for my book *now*. Read it and profit by all it teaches you. That is all I ask. Simply send me your name and address, and you will receive the book postpaid by return mail.

Alois P. Swoboda,
416 Manhattan Bldg., Chicago.

Tufts
"Better than Sterling"



Tufts silver is "better than sterling" for Christmas gifts. As compared with sterling, its price is trifling.

About nineteen-twentieths of the silver in a piece of sterling is practically useless—only the surface is ever seen—only the surface meets the wear.

The outside silver on a piece of Tufts ware is the heaviest silver plate applied. It lasts almost as long as sterling and has the same appearance.

An expenditure that would buy but little sterling has wonderful purchasing power when applied to Tufts silver. In buying silver of Tufts you buy direct from the maker, and do not contribute to middlemen's profits.

Order Christmas gifts direct from this illustration.

PRICES OF THE ARTICLES SHOWN:

No. 3700 Mirror	\$4.00	No. 4957	\$9.50
No. 3700 Brush	4.50	No. 3713	4.00
No. 3700 Comb	1.25	No. 50	2.85
No. 3701	3.25	No. 1670	.70
No. 3703	2.50	No. 1639	.45 Silver
No. 3704	2.25		.60 Gold Lined
No. 3724	3.50	No. 1671	.75
No. 3725	1.50	No. 4388	4.00
No. 3726	1.25		
No. 3727	1.25		

We prepay all delivery charges. We will take back any unsatisfactory purchase and refund the amount sent us.

FREE. Our newest catalog of choice Christmas designs—a beautifully illustrated book of silverware for all household uses. Write for it—write now.

James W. Tufts Silverware Co.
280 N. Congress St., Boston, Mass.



This Razor must pay for itself before You Pay me a Penny

---and a Postal gets it. I
Guarantee to Keep your
Blades Sharp Forever
Without Charge.



I am the man you hold personally responsible for every promise made in this advertisement.

P. C. SHERMAN

home and business address—and in any manner that is convenient or agreeable to you introduce yourself to me.

I'll take all the risk and send, prepaid, a Sterling Safety Razor with 24 blades, or an Old Style Interchangeable Razor with 12 blades.

You see the Sterling Razor is so much better than any other razor that I can afford to send one without any payment or deposit.

When you have tested it 7 days, if you find it the finest and easiest shaving razor you ever used, keep it.

Then the razor must pay for itself—that's my new plan.

You see, the average man should be shaved at least three times a week—at 15c. a shave that's 45c. a week for shaving.

So, if you decide to keep the razor, all I ask you to pay me is what you'd pay the barber—45c. a week for a few weeks until the razor is paid for.

That way I make the barber buy you the razor.

At that my razor doesn't take any more money to pay for itself than you would have to pay out of your own pocket for an ordinary razor.

And I go even farther.

I see it to that your blades are kept sharp forever—free.

With any other safety razor you are always paying out money because you must keep on paying for new blades or resharpening as long as you live.

But with the Sterling all you do is, send me 12 dull blades, at any time, with 10 cents to cover mailing expenses, and I return them to you perfectly sharp free of charge.

That's really "no honing and no stropping."

Did you ever hear of anything as clever as this in the razor line?

It's this way—the reason I can make this offer is because I'm not in the least doubtful or afraid of my razor.

My STERLING blades are made of the finest razor steel that money can buy—costs me twice as much as the steel used in any other razor blades.

And mine is the only razor on the market that is made of genuine Sheffield steel—that is not a cold rolled steel.

WILL you let me send you a razor—without a cent deposit?

Then I will keep it sharp and keen for the rest of your life free.

That's my plan—my new plan of selling razors.

No other razor makers in the world sell razors this way—because they can't—their razors won't stand it. Mine will—it's the way it's made.

Now, I don't say, "Send me the price of the razor, and if, after you have tried it, you find that it isn't all I claim, I will send your money back."—Not me.

On a "money back" proposition you may feel that there was some chance of not getting your money back if you wanted it—I won't let you feel that way about my razor.

For if the razor don't do all I say, you send it back at my expense, and you're out nothing, for you've paid me nothing and you owe me nothing.

Simply do this—Send me your name, occupation,



24 Blades



With my careful, systematic process, each STERLING blade is hardened, tempered, ground and honed in oil, and then hand stropped—so that my razor must hold its edge.

And each of my STERLING blades must pass the SHERMAN test, the most rigid test to which a razor blade can be subjected.

I must make certain that the temper and cutting edge of every STERLING blade is perfect and lasting. I cannot afford to pass any but faultless razor blades, because I send you the razor, prepaid, for free trial without any deposit but your name, address and the introduction. If you don't introduce yourself to me I will have to write you to do so, and that will delay shipment of the Sterling.

After you have tried it for a week, you can buy the Sterling Razor for \$5.00 cash or postal order, but I am willing to let it pay for itself.

Now—write me to-day, stating whether you wish the Safety or Old Style Interchangeable, and let me send you the razor. State whether you wish to cut close or medium, and whether your beard is wiry or fine. Don't send me any money—only a postal.

Remember the razor is yours for a week free—then either keep it and let it pay blades sharp forever—free—or return it to

You have not seen this advertisement for the past 6 months because of the enormous volume of orders received last spring. We have been compelled to increase our factory capacity a hundred fold and am now in a position to fill any number of orders promptly.

P. C. SHERMAN, Pres.,
Dept. 52, 281-283 Water St., New York City.

Let Us Send You On Trial
This Two-Horn

DUPLEX

THE IDEAL

Christmas Gift

For your family, your parents, your friend or for yourself. Music—everyone enjoys. A gift that insures many pleasant memories.

Direct
from our
Factory
to any
Address
in U. S.

FREIGHT PREPAID



ORDER EARLY.

Each horn is 30 inches long with a 17 inch bell.

An Entirely New Principle in Phonographs

- Two vibrating diaphragms to reproduce the sound.
 - Two horns to amplify and multiply all the sound from **both** sides of **both** diaphragms.
 - No tension spring and no swing arm to cause harsh, discordant, mechanical sounds.
- Consequently, the Duplex produces a sweeter tone and greater volume of music than any other phonograph and is absolutely free from all metallic sounds.

Size of cabinet, 18 inches by 14 by 10 inches high.

Double Volume of Sound.

HERE is the explanation of the Duplex principle: When you hit a tin pan with a stick, which **side** of the tin pan gives forth the noise? Why both sides of course.

If you collect the waves from **one** side of the vibrating pan, you get only **half** the noise. That's plain, isn't it?

Well, the same thing holds true of the diaphragm of a phonograph.

In every talking machine made heretofore, one-half of the sound waves were **wasted**. You got just one-half the sound that the diaphragm made—the rest was lost.

The **Duplex** is the first and the only phonograph to collect the vibrations and get **all** the sound from **both** sides of the diaphragm.

Because the reproducer or sound box of the Duplex has **two** vibrating diaphragms and **two** horns (as you see) to amplify the sound from **both** sides of **both** diaphragms.

The **Duplex**, therefore, gives you **all** the music produced with any other you lose one-half.

Compare the volume of sound produced by it with the volume of **any** other—no matter what its price—and hear for yourself.

Purer, Sweeter Tone

BUT that is not all, by any means.

For the Duplex Phonograph not only produces **more music**—a greater volume—but the tone is clearer, sweeter, purer and more nearly like the original than is produced by any other mechanical means.

By using **two** diaphragms in the Duplex we are able to disperse **entirely** with **all** springs in the reproducer.

The tension spring used in the old style reproducers 'jerk' the diaphragm back into position each time it vibrates, by its jerking pull **roughens** the fine wave groove in the record, and that causes the **squeaking**, squawking, harsh, metallic sound that sets your teeth on edge when you hear the old style phonograph.

In the Duplex the wave grooves of the record remain perfectly smooth—there is nothing to roughen them—and the result is an **exact reproduction** of the original sound.

As a special guarantee against the presence of harshness resulting from vibration, the points of contact between the horns and reproducer are protected by rubber—an exclusive feature of the Duplex Phonograph.

Write today for catalog and full particulars of our **FREE** trial offer. You will never regret it. Please address

The Duplex Phonograph Co., 134 Patterson Street, **Kalamazoo, Mich.**

Direct From Our Factory

WE ask the privilege of **proving** to you that the Duplex gives a double volume of music, of purer, sweeter tone than any other phonograph made.

We want to prove it at our expense. We ask you to let us send you one **at our expense**—under an arrangement mutually satisfactory—for use in your home one week.

Invite your neighbors and musical friends to hear it, and if they do not pronounce it better—in volume and in tone—than the **best** old style phonograph, return it at once at our expense. That's a fair offer, but it isn't all.

We save you in the price exactly \$70.15—because we save you all the jobbers', middlemen's and dealers' profits. We are **actual manufacturers**—not jobbers—and sell direct to you at factory prices.

Sold through dealers the Duplex would cost you at least \$100—and it would be a bargain at that. Bought direct from our factory it costs you (one profit added) only

\$29.85

And you get a seven days' trial in your own home—and are under no obligation to keep it if you are not satisfied. You run no risk, for this advertisement could not appear in this magazine if we did not carry out our promises.

Music In Your Home.

THINK what a Duplex Phonograph will mean to you! The variety of entertainment you can command at trifling expense is practically unlimited.

You can enjoy a delightful selection of songs, poems, piano, banjo, guitar, or violin music, short stories, anecdotes or dialect pieces, all reproduced by the marvelous two horned Duplex with the faultless fidelity of an instantaneous photograph.

You can bring to your family and friends, in all their original beauty, the priceless gems of musical art, the classic performances of famous Artists like Paderewski, D'Albert, Raoul Pugno, and Jan Kubelik.

Or, you can listen, entranced, to the magic notes of melody fresh from the throat of a Patti, Melba, or Calve, and the great dramatic tenors, Caruso and Tarnagano.

And, best of all, you can hear once more, the voice of dear old Joe Jefferson 'as, with matchless pathos, he delivers the lines of Rip Van Winkle so familiar to a former generation.

With every Duplex we send free six 7 inch or three 10 inch records.



Pabst Extract Calendar for 1907

This charming panel shows in richest coloring the vivacious health and beauty of the women who achieve and maintain physical perfection by the aid of

Pabst Extract

The "Best" Tonic

For those who are run down, fagged-out, over-worked, nervous, anæmic and languid, Pabst Extract, rich in the food extractives of malt and the tonic properties of hops, is not only The "Best" Tonic, but a healthy, wholesome food, giving strength and vitality to the entire system.

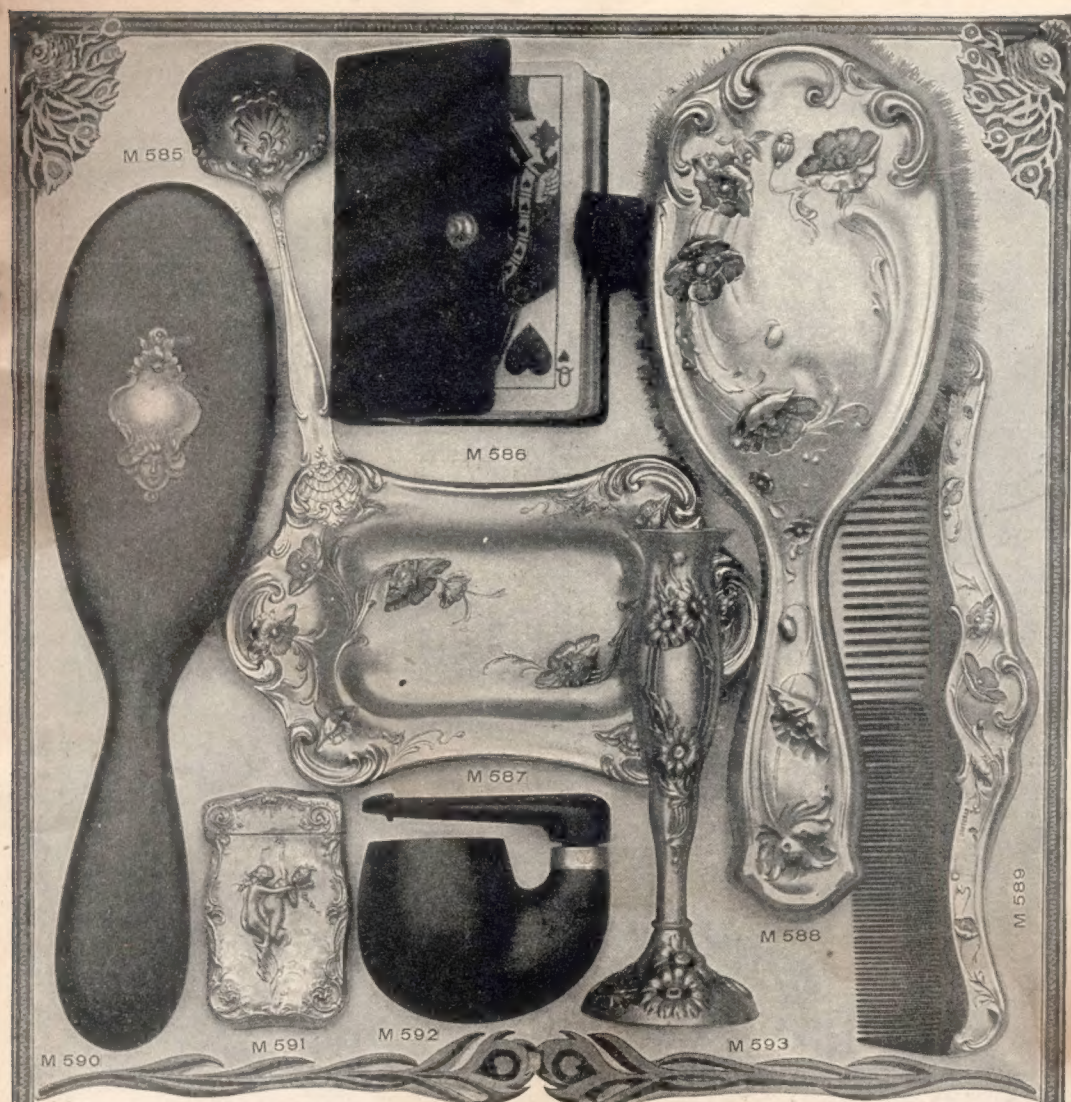
This handsome art calendar, size 7½x36 inches, is exquisitely printed in seventeen colors and is a striking example of Bryson's best style in portraying the American Girl. It is free from advertising and makes a most charming decoration for the library, den or office.

The calendar will be sent, postpaid, to any address upon receipt of 10c in coin or stamps. Address

Pabst Extract, Dept. C, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Mention this magazine when ordering.





The above illustrations are one-half the actual size of the articles.

- | | |
|---|---|
| M 585—Sterling Silver Cream Ladle, Gilt Bowl, \$1.00. | M 590—Fine Ebony Hair Brush, Sterling Silver Shield, \$1.50. |
| M 586—Leather Playing Card Case, with 3 packs gilt edged cards, \$1.25. | M 591—Sterling Silver Match Safe, "Twin Stars," \$1.50. |
| M 587—Sterling Silver Hair Pin Tray, "Intaglio" pattern, \$2.75. | M 592—German French Briar "Auto" Pipe, Sterling Silver Ferrule, \$1.25. |
| M 588—Sterling Silver Hair Brush, "Intaglio" pattern, \$4.00. | M 593—Sterling Silver Hat Pin Holder, French Gray finish, \$1.50. |
| M 589—Sterling Silver Comb, "Intaglio" pattern, \$1.50. | |

For The Holidays

Goods of Peacock quality make the most satisfactory and lasting presents. Any of these beautiful things will be suitable almost anywhere, and the name Peacock will be recognized by the recipient as a mark of uniqueness and quality. We will send post or express paid on receipt of price, guaranteeing prompt delivery and complete satisfaction. If you are not entirely pleased we will return the price paid in full without discussion. We will send goods C. O. D. subject to examination, if preferred. Our customers buy largely by mail and to make it as easy as possible we have prepared a

New Shopping Guide of the Peacock Store

A wonderfully interesting and attractive book of 200 Pages showing about 5500 illustrations of our stock of

Jewelry, Diamonds, Silverware, Plated Ware, Cut Glass, China and Leather Goods

This book is illustrated by engravings made from the goods themselves—not touched-up drawings. For completeness, beauty and usefulness in selecting presents or souvenirs for any occasion, we know of no publication anywhere to equal it. We would like you to have a copy in your home. A postal card request will suffice. Ask for Shopping Guide No. 11.

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EXTENDED TO MATURITY



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Quaker Rice

From Sunrise to Sunset

you can eat Quaker Rice with delight and satisfaction. It is carefully selected and perfect rice kernels puffed or expanded and thoroughly cooked, giving it a delicious crispness and a delicate daintiness different from anything you have eaten.

Quaker Rice

(Puffed)

is rich in nutriment, easily digested and exceedingly appetizing. Children can eat Quaker Rice at meals and between meals. Always heat before serving.

Recipes for Dainty Christmas Confections

On every package of Quaker Rice are recipes for many dainty confections such as Quaker Rice Candy, Quaker Rice Brittle, etc. Quaker Rice parties are growing in popularity among the young, for all of these Quaker Rice confections can be easily and quickly made in your own home.

Quaker Rice is sold by grocers everywhere at 10c the package.

(Except in the extreme South and far West.)

Made by The Quaker Oats Company,
Chicago, U. S. A.

Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen

The pen with the Clip-Cap

Pen of the hour



Two-fifty

For \$250 and upwards pens may be purchased. Silver and gold mounted pens are higher priced, as shown at the side. Prices vary according to size of gold pens contained in the holder. Pen points are made to match any steel pen and suit every writer. Tipped with iridium they do not wear out. The Spoon Feed on Waterman's Ideal Fountain Pen has made it the Standard of the World. All reputable dealers carry the genuine. There are imitations.

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